

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1870.

BESSY RANE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXX.

JELLY'S TROUBLES.

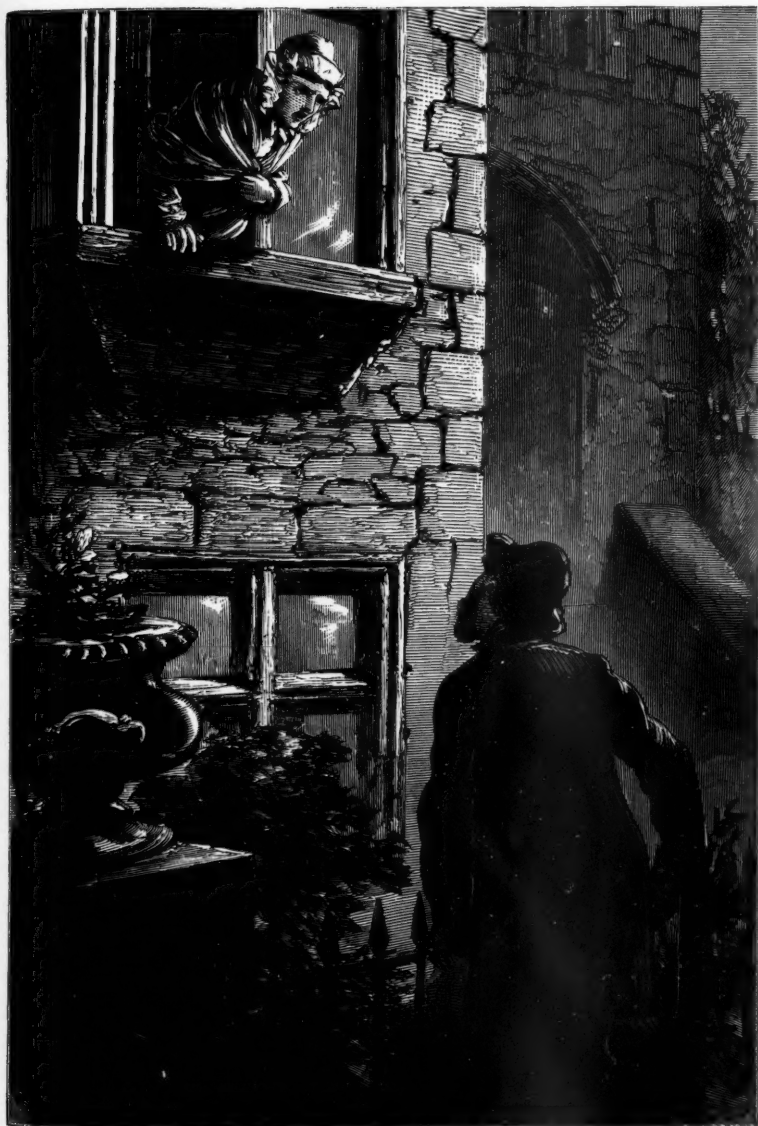
WITH the same rapidity, to outward appearance, that the sickness had come on, so did it subside in Dallory. Mrs. Rane's was the last serious case; the last death; the very few attacks afterwards were of the mildest description; and within a fortnight of the time that ill-fated lady was laid in the ground, people were fumigating their houses and throwing their rooms open to the renewed healthy air.

The inhabitants in general, rallying their depressed courage, thought the sooner they forgot the episode the better. Save perhaps by the inmates of those houses from which some one had been taken, they did soon forget it. It was surprising—now that magnifying fear was at an end and matters could be summed up dispassionately—how few the gaps were. With the exception of Henry Hepburn the undertaker and Mrs. Rane, they lay entirely amidst the poor working people out on strike; and, of those, principally amidst the children. Mrs. Gass told men to their faces that the fever had come of nothing but famine and deprivation, and that they had only themselves to thank for it. She was in the habit, as the reader knows, of dealing out to them some home truths: but she had dealt out something else during the sickness—and that was, good nourishing food. She continued to do so still to those whose frames had been weakened by it: but she gave them due warning that it was only temporary help, which they'd never have received from her but for the fever. And so the visitation grew into a thing of the past, and Dallory was itself again.

One, there was, however, who could not forget: with whom that unhappy past, or rather a calamity left by it, was present night and day.

Jelly. That Dr. Rane had in some way wilfully caused the death of his wife, Jelly was as sure of as though she had seen it done. Her suspicion pointed to laudanum; or to some preparation of the kind. Suspicion? Nay, with her it was a certainty. In that last day of Bessy Rane's life, when she was described as sleeping, sleeping, always sleeping; when her sole cry had been—"I am easy, only let me sleep," Jelly now felt that Dr. Rane knew she had been quietly sleeping away to death. Indelibly as though it had been written on her heart with the pen of truth, lay the conviction. About that, there could be neither doubt nor hesitation in her mind: the difficulty was—what ought to be her own course?

In all Jelly's past life she had never been actually superstitious: if told that she was so now, she would have replied Yes, because circumstances forced it upon her. That Mrs. Rane's spirit had appeared to her that memorable night to one sole intent—namely, that she, Jelly, should avenge her dreadful end by disclosing it to the public, Jelly believed as implicitly as she believed in the Gospel. Not a soul in the whole wide world but herself (save of course Dr. Rane) had the faintest idea that the death was not a natural one. Jelly moaned and groaned, and thought her fate unjustly hard that *she* should have been signalled out by heaven (for that's how she solemnly put it) for the revelation, when there were so many other people in the community of Dallory. Jelly had fits of real despondency, when she didn't quite know whether her head was on or off, or whether her mind wouldn't "go." Why couldn't the ghost have appeared to somebody else, she mentally asked at these moments: to Phillis, say; or to Dinah; or to Seeley the surgeon: just because she had been performing an act of charity in sitting-up with Ketlar's sick child, it must show itself to *her*! And then Jelly's brain would go off into suppositions, that it might have puzzled one, wiser than she was, to answer. Suppose she had not been at Ketlar's that night, the staircase blind would have been drawn down at dusk as usual, she would have gone to bed at her customary hour, seeing nothing, and been spared all this misery. But no. It was not to be. She went to Ketlar's; she stayed with the sick child to a strangely late hour, because Ketlar himself was detained out: when she reached home she found no light placed for her; she found the blind not down, both through Dinah's omission: and so—she saw what she did see. And although Jelly, in her temper, might wish to throw the blame on Ketlar for staying out, and on Dinah for her negligence, she recognized the finger of Destiny in all this, and knew she could not have turned aside from it. *What* was she to do? Living in mortal dread of seeing again the apparition, feeling somehow a certainty within herself that she should see it, Jelly pondered the question every hour of the day. Things could not rest as they were. On the one hand, there was her natural repugnance to denounce Dr. Rane (just as there had been in the case of the



"What on earth do you want here at this hour, Ketlar?"

Printed and published by J. W. B. B. B. B.

and printed by J. W. B. B. B.

and printed by J. W. B. B. B.

anonymous letter), not only because she was in the service of his mother, but for his own sake ; for Jelly, with all her faults, as to curiosity and the like, had not a bad heart. On the other, there was the weighty secret revealed to her by the dead woman—and the expression is not wrong, for, *but* for that apparition Jelly would have known no more than the rest of the world—and the obligation it laid upon her. Yet—*how* could she speak?—when the faintest breath of such an accusation against her son, would assuredly kill Mrs. Cumberland in her present critical state ! and to Jelly she was a good and kind mistress. No, she could never do it. With all this conflict within her, no wonder Jelly lost flesh and appetite : she had been thin enough before, she was like a veritable skeleton now. As to the revelation to Mrs. Gass, Jelly might just as well have made it to the moon. For that lady, after the first shock was past, absolutely refused to give credence to the tale : and had appeared ever since, by her manner, to ignore it as completely as though it had never been spoken.

Gradually Jelly grew disturbed by another fear—that she might be taken up as an accomplice after the fact. She was sure she had heard of such cases : and she tormented Tim Wilks nearly out of his patience—that gentleman having recovered his temporary indisposition—by asking perpetual questions of what the law might do to a person who found out that another had committed some crime, and concealed the knowledge : say stole a purse, for instance, and kept the money—for that's how Jelly generally put it.

One night, when Jelly, by some fortunate chance, had really got to sleep early—for she more often lay awake till morning light—a ring at the door-bell suddenly aroused her. Mrs. Cumberland had caused a loud night-bell to be affixed to the door : in case of fire, she said : it hung on this first landing, close, so to say, to Jelly's head, so that she awoke instantly. Dinah, sleeping above, might have heard it just as well as Jelly ; but Dinah was a hard sleeper—most people are so who have plenty of work to do, and nothing to worry them—and the bell, as Jelly knew, might ring for an hour before it awoke her. However, Jelly lay, not caring to get up herself, hoping against hope, and wondering who in the world could be ringing, unless it was somebody mistaking their house for Dr. Rane's. Which had happened before.

Ring ; ring. It was not a loud ring by any means ; but a gentle one, as if the applicant did it in deprecation. Jelly lay on. She was not afraid that it was connected with the sight she was always in mortal dread of again seeing, since ghosts don't come ringing to announce their visits, after the manner of men and women. In fact, the surprise, and the speculating who it could be, put the fear for the time being altogether out of Jelly's head.

Ring ; ring ; ring. Rather a louder peal this turn, as if a little impatience mingled with the deprecation.

"Drat that girl!" cried Jelly in her wrath, finding that she must get up after all.

Flinging on a warm shawl, and putting her feet into her shoes, Jelly proceeded to the front room—Mrs. Cumberland's chamber when she was at home—threw up the window, and called out to know who was there. A little man, stepping back from the door into the bright moonlight, looked up to answer—and Jelly recognized the form and voice of Ketlar.

"It's me," said he.

"You!" interrupted Jelly, not allowing the man to continue. "What on earth do you want here at this hour?"

"I came to tell you the news about poor Cissy. She's dead."

"Couldn't it wait?" tartly returned Jelly, overlooking the sad nature of the tidings in her anger at being disturbed out of her bed. "Would it have run away that you must come and knock folks up to tell it, as if you'd been the telegraph?"

"It was my wife made me come," spoke Ketlar, with much humility. "She's in a peck o' grief, Jelly, and nothing 'ud do but I must come right off and tell you; she thought, mayhap, you'd not be gone to bed."

"Not gone to bed at twelve o'clock at night!" retorted Jelly. "And there it is, striking: if you've got any ears to hear. You must be a fool, Ketlar."

"Well, I'm sorry to have disturbed you," said the man, with a sigh. "I'd not have done it of myself; but poor Susan was taking on so, I couldn't say her nay. We was all of us so fond of the child: and—and—"

Ketlar broke down with a great sob. The man had loved his child: and he was weak and faint with hunger. It a little appeased Jelly: not very much.

"I suppose you don't expect me to dress myself and come off to Susan at this hour?" she resentfully exclaimed, her tone, however, not quite so sharp.

"Law bless you, no," answered Ketlar. "What good would that do? It couldn't bring Cissy back to life."

"Ketlar, it's just this—instead of being upset with grief, you and Susan, you might be thankful that the child's taken out of the distress of this world. She won't cry for food where she's gone, and find none."

The man's sobs were renewed at the last suggestion. But Jelly had really meant it in the light of consolation.

"She was your god-child, Jelly."

"You needn't tell it me," answered Jelly. "Could I have saved her life at any trouble or cost, I'd not have grudged it. If I had a home of my own I'd have taken her to it, but I'm only in service, as you know. Ketlar, it is the strike that has killed that child."

Ketlar answered nothing.

"Cissy was a weakly child and required extra comforts : as long as you were in work, she had them, but when that dropped off—leastways, when *you* dropped it, I should say," amended Jelly, who did not let the opportunity slip for dealing out a modicum of reproach—"of course the child suffered. And now she's gone ! She is better off, Ketlar."

"Yes," assented the man as if he were heart-broken. "If it wasn't for the thought of the rest, I wish it was me that was gone instead."

"Well, give my love to Susan, and say I'm sorry for it altogether, and I'll come down sometime in the morning. And, look here, Ketlar—what about the money for the burial ? You've not got anything towards it, I expect."

Ketlar caught up his breath. "Not a penny."

"Well, I know you'd not like the poor little thing to be buried by the parish, so I'll see what's to be done, tell Susan. Good night."

Jelly shut down the window with a bang. She really looked upon the strike as having led to the child's death—and in a remote degree possibly it had : so, what with that, and what with the untimely disturbance from her bed, her tartness of manner was somewhat excusable.

In passing back across the landing to her own chamber, with no more superstitious thoughts in her mind just then than if she had never had cause to entertain such, the large window became suddenly illuminated. Jelly stopped. Her heart, as she would herself have expressed it, leaped into her mouth. The light came from the outside : no doubt from Dr. Rane's. Jelly stood stock still. And then—what desperate courage impelled her, she never knew, but believed afterwards it must have been something akin to the fascination of the basilisk—she advanced to the window, and pulled aside the white blind.

But she did not see Bessy Rane this time, as perhaps she had expected : only her husband. Dr. Rane had a candle in his hand, and was apparently picking up something he had let fall quite close to the large opposite window. It was this candle that had lighted up Jelly's window. In another moment he lodged the candle on a chair that stood there, so as to have both hands at liberty. Jelly watched. What he had dropped appeared to be several articles of his deceased wife's clothing, some of which had come unfolded in the fall. He soon had them within his arm again, caught up the candle, and went down-stairs. Jelly saw and recognized one beautiful Indian shawl, scarlet with a gold border, which had been a present from her own mistress to Bessy.

"He is going to pack them up and sell them, the wicked man !" spoke Jelly, in her strong conviction. And her ire grew very strong against Dr. Rane. "I'd almost rather have seen the spirit of his poor wife again than *this*," was her bitter comment, as she finally went into her room.

Putting aside all the solemn doubts and fears that were making havoc with Jelly's mind, her curiosity was insatiable. Perhaps no woman in

all Dallory had so great a propensity for prying into other people's affairs, as she. Not, it must be again acknowledged, to do them harm; but simply in her world-wide inquisitiveness.

On the following morning, when Jelly attired herself to go to Ketlar's after breakfast—which meal was seasoned throughout with reproaches to Dinah for not hearing the night-bell—she bethought herself that she could first of all step into the next door. Ostensibly for the neighbourly object of informing Phillis of the death of the child: really, to pick up any items of information there might be to pick up. Dr. Rane, it may be here remarked, had given Molly Green a character to get herself another place; himself preferring to retain the elder servant, Phillis; who, however, only went to him by day. The doctor was alone in his house at night, and Jelly believed he dared not have even old Phillis in, knowing it was haunted. He made no secret now of his intention to quit Dallory. As soon as his practice should be disposed of, and the tontine money paid, away he would go.

Jelly coolly walked out at the window of Mrs. Cumberland's dining-room, and through that of the doctor's. She had seen him go out some little time before. Phillis was upstairs, putting her master's chamber to-rights, and Jelly sought her there. She told of the fright Ketlar had given her, by coming at midnight to bring the news about Cissy: and Phillis, who had a tender heart, dropped a tear or two to the child's memory. Cissy had been loved by everybody.

"Miss Dallory will be sorry to hear this when she comes back," remarked Phillis.

"I say, Phillis, what does your master mean to do with Mrs. Rane's clothes?" abruptly asked Jelly.

Phillis, dusting the looking-glass at the moment, paused in her occupation, as if considering.

"I'm sure I don't know, Jelly. He pointed out a few of the plain things to me one day, and said I might divide them between myself and Molly Green; but that he'd not like to see us wear them till he was gone away. As of course we shouldn't, being in black for her."

"She had lots of beautiful clothes. I'm sure the shawls, and scarfs, and embroidered robes, and worked petticoats, and other valuable Indian things that my mistress was always giving her, would have set up any lady's wardrobe. What will he do with *them*?"

Phillis shook her head, and pointed to a large, high chest-of-drawers. Her heart was full yet when she spoke of her late mistress.

"They are all in there, Jelly."

Are they! thought Jelly. But Phillis was going down now, her occupation finished. Jelly lingered behind, and thrust her black bonnet out at the window, as if looking at something up the road. When Phillis had descended the stairs, Jelly tried the drawers. All were locked except one. That one, which Jelly softly drew open, was filled with

articles belonging to the late Mrs. Rane ; none of them, so far as Jelly could gather by the cursory glance and touch, of much value.

"Yes," she said bitterly. "He keeps these open for show : but he is sending away the best. Those other drawers, if they could be looked into, are empty."

If ever Jelly had been startled in all her life at human footstep, it was to hear that of Dr. Rane on the stairs. How she got the drawer shut ; how she got her head stretched out at the window again as far as ever it would stretch, she hardly knew. The doctor came in. Jelly, bringing in her head, apparently as much surprised as if a rhinoceros had walked up, apologised and explained rather lamely. She supposed Phillis must have gone down, she said, while she was watching that impudent butcher's boy : she had made bold to step up to tell Phillis about Ketlar's little girl.

"Ah, she is gone," observed Dr. Rane, as Jelly was walking out. "There has been no hope of her for some time."

"No, sir, I know there hasn't," replied Jelly, somewhat recovering her equanimity. "I told Ketlar that he may thank the strike for it."

Jelly got out with this, and was whisking through the gray room, when the doctor spoke again.

"Have you heard from your mistress this morning, Jelly ?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I have. I am very much afraid that she is exceedingly ill, Jelly ?"

"Dinah got a letter from Ann a day or two ago, sir ; she said in it that her missis was looking worse, and seemed lower than she'd ever known her."

"Ay, I wish she would come home. Eastsea is far away, and I cannot be running there perpetually," added the doctor, as he shut the chamber door in Jelly's face.

Leaning back on the pillows of an invalid's chair was Arthur Bohun, looking as yellow as gold. He had had an attack of jaundice. The day of James Bohun's funeral it had poured with rain ; Arthur got wet, standing at the grave, and caught a chill. It terminated in yellow jaundice—the distressed state of his mind no doubt doing its full part towards bringing on the malady. At first the doctors were afraid of bilious fever, but the danger of that passed. He was recovering now. Sir Nash, at whose house he lay, was everything that was kind.

Madam was kind also : at least she made a great professing show of it. Her private object in life just now was to get her son to marry Miss Dallery. Madam cared no more for her son Arthur or his welfare than she did for Richard North ; but she had the shrewdness to foresee that the source whence her large supplies of money had hitherto come, was now dried up : and she hoped to get some out of Arthur for

the future. The marrying an heiress, wealthy as Mary Dallory, would vastly increase his power and means of helping her. Moreover, she wished to be effectually relieved from that horrible nightmare that haunted her still—the possibility of his wedding Ellen Adair.

So Madam laid her plans—as it was in her scheming nature ever to be laying them—and contrived to get Miss Dallory (at that time in London with her aunt) to Sir Nash Bohun's for a few days' visit when Arthur was recovering. The young lady was there now; and Matilda North was there; and they both spent a good portion of every day with Arthur; and Sir Nash made much of Mary Dallory, partly because he liked her for herself, and partly because he thought there was a probability that she would be Arthur's wife. During his illness, Captain Bohun had had time to reflect: not only time, but *calmness*, in the lassitude it cast on him mentally and bodily: and he began to see his immediate way somewhat clearer. To hold off and say nothing, give no explanation to the two ladies at Eastsea, to whom he was acting (as he felt) so base a part, was the very worst form of cowardice; and, though he could not explain to Ellen Adair, he was now anxious to do so to Mrs. Cumberland. Accordingly the first use he made of his partially-recovered health, was to cause writing materials to be put on the bed and pen her a note in very shaky characters. He spoke of his serious illness, stated that certain "untoward circumstances" had occurred to intercept his plans, but that as soon as he was sufficiently well to travel he should beg of her to appoint a time when she could allow him a private conference.

The return post brought him a letter from Ellen. Rather to his consternation. Ellen assumed—not unnaturally, as the reader will find, a page or two further on—that the sole cause of his mysterious absence was illness; that he had been ill from the first, and unable to travel. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAREST ARTHUR,—I cannot express to you what my feelings are this morning; so full of joy, yet full of pain. Oh I cannot tell you what the past two or three weeks have been to me: looking back, it almost seems a wonder that I *lived* through them. For I thought—I thought—I will not say here what I thought, and perhaps I could not, only that you were never coming more; and that it was to me agony worse than death. And to hear now that you could not come; that the cause of your silence and absence has been dangerous illness, brings to me a great sorrow and shame. Oh Arthur, my dearest, forgive me! Forgive also my writing to you in this free manner; but it almost seems to me as though you were already my husband. Had you been called away but half an hour later you would have been, and perhaps even might have had me with you in your illness.

"I should like to write pages and pages, but you may be too ill yet to

read much, and so I will stop here. May God watch over you and bring you round again.

"Ever yours, Arthur, yours only, with the great love of my whole heart,
"ELLEN ADAIR."

And Captain Arthur Bohun, in spite of the cruel fate that had parted them, in spite of his best hope never to see her more, pressed the letter to his heart, and the sweet name, Ellen Adair—sweeter than any he would ever hear—to his lips, and shed tears of anguish over it in the feebleness induced by illness.

They might take Mary Dallory to his room as much as they pleased; and Matilda might exert her little wiles to subtly praise her, and Madam hers to leave them "accidentally" together; but his heart was too full of another, and of its own bitter pain, to allow room for as much as a responsive thought to Mary Dallory.

"Arthur is frightfully languid and apathetical!" spoke Miss North one day in a burst of resentment. "I'm sure he is quite rude to me and Mary: he'll let us sit there by him for an hour, and never speak."

"Consider how ill he has been—and is," was the remonstrating answer of Sir Nash.

Mrs. Cumberland's span of life was drawing into a very narrow space: and it might be that she was beginning to suspect this. For some months she had been getting inwardly weaker; but the weakness had for a week or two been visibly and rapidly increasing. The unaccountable behaviour of Captain Bohun had tried her—for Ellen's sake. She was responsible to Mr. Adair for the welfare of his daughter, and the matter was a source of daily and hourly annoyance to her mind. When this second tardy note arrived, she considered it, in one sense, a satisfactory explanation; in another, not; since, if Captain Bohun had been too ill to write himself, why did he not get some one else to write to her and say so? However, she was willing to persuade herself that all would be right; and she told Ellen, without showing her the note, that Captain Bohun had been dangerously ill, unable to come or write. Hence Miss Ellen's return letter.

But, apart from the silent progress of the illness in itself, nothing had done Mrs. Cumberland so much harm as the news of her daughter-in-law's death. It had been allowed to reach her abruptly, without the smallest warning. I suppose there is something in our common nature that urges us to impart sad tidings to others. We are all alike in it. However grievous and horrible they may be, we find pleasure in imparting them: and Dinah, Jelly's friend and underling, proved no exception. On the day after the death, she sat down and indited a letter to her fellow-servant, Ann, at Eastsea, in which she detailed the short progress of Mrs. Rane's illness, and described the death as "awful sudden." Ann, before she had well mastered the cramped lines, ran with white

face and open mouth to her mistress; and Miss Adair afterwards told her that she ought to have known better. That it was too great a shock for Mrs. Cumberland in her critical state, the girl in her repentance saw. Mrs. Cumberland asked for the letter, and scarcely had it out of her hand for hours and hours. Dead! apparently from no cause; for the fever had lasted but a day, Dinah said, and was gone again. Mrs. Cumberland, in her bewilderment, began actually to think it was a fable.

Not for two or three days did she receive confirmation from Dr. Rane. Of course the doctor did not know and did not suppose that any one else would be writing to Eastsea: and he was perhaps willing to spare his mother the news as long as he could. He shortly described the illness—saying that he, himself, had entertained but little hope from the first, from the severity of the fever. But all this did not tend to soothe Mrs. Cumberland; and in the two or three weeks that afterwards went on, she faded palpably. Little wonder the impression, that she was growing worse, made its way to Dallory.

CHAPTER XXXI.

COMING HOME TO DIE.

TIME went on again; nearly a fortnight. Dallory had relapsed into its old routine, and the fever was forgotten. Houses had recovered the smell of soap and scrubbing; their inhabitants were back again; and amidst them Mrs. North and her daughter Matilda.

The chief news Madam found to interest her was, that Richard North had opened the works again. The glow of hope it raised within her was bright indeed; for she looked upon it as an earnest that supplies would come in again for the future as they had in the past. That she would find herself mistaken was exceedingly probable; Richard himself could have said a certainty. Madam had the grace to express some calm regret for the untimely death of Bessy, in the hearing of Mr. North and Richard; she had put herself and Matilda into deeper mourning than they had assumed for James Bohun. It was all of the most fashionable and costly kind; and the master of Dallory Hall, poor helpless man, had the pleasure of receiving the bills for it from the London court-milliners and dressmakers. But Madam never enquired into the particulars of Bessy's illness and death; in her opinion the less fevers were talked of the better.

Yes; the North works were re-opened. Or, to be quite correct, they were close on the point of it. Upon how small a scale he must begin again, Richard, remembering the magnitude of past operations, felt almost ashamed to think. But, as he good-humouredly remarked,

half a loaf was better than no bread. He must get a living; he had not a fortune in the bank, or elsewhere, to fly to; and he preferred doing this to seeking employment under other firms, if indeed anything worth having had been to be found; but the country's trade was in a most depressed state, and hundreds of gentlemen, like himself, had been thrown out. It was the same thing as beginning life over again; just a little venture, that might succeed or might not; one in which he must plod on carefully and cautiously, even to keep it going.

The whole staff of operatives would at first be under twenty men. The old workmen, idly airing themselves still in North Inlet, laughed derisively when they heard this. Twenty men, indoor and out, including the master himself, in that there big block o' buildings, they shouted to one another. What was they a-going to make—wheelbarrers?—bridges for dogs to trot across?—railway carriages to carry dolls? The men were pleasantly sarcastic over it, thinking perhaps they concealed their real bitterness of heart. The new measure did not find favour with them. How should it, when they stood in the light of excluded parties? Some eight or ten, who had never been willing upholders of the strike, who had been ready to return to work all along, would be taken on again; the rest, foreigners, Richard North was bringing over from abroad. And the ire of the disaffected was great.

Truly the men were like the dog in the manger—as Richard North formerly told them. They would not do the work themselves: had Richard now again offered it to them, they would have declined it, as before: and yet they wished to prevent others doing it. Ay, and intended to prevent, luck being good for it. The strike and its disastrous accompaniments seemed to have wholly changed the character of these poor mistaken operatives. They used, speaking of them as a whole, to be as respectable and civil and sensible a body of men as one could wish to find; but now they were sullen and depressed, almost ferocious, next door to desperate. Out at pocket and elbows; out of hope and heart; their homes were desolate, their wives resentful, their children ragged, sickly, dying. Neither men nor women, neither growing children nor infants, ever knew now what it was to have a substantial meal of good wholesome food. And of course the question lay heavily on the minds of the most thoughtful—Where and in what way was it to end? Richard North had told them—in starvation, or the workhouse; and the prospect looked nearer now than it had then. The only thing money seemed to be found pretty readily for, was tobacco: since the men might still be seen with their pipes. Beer also could be bought occasionally—and perhaps they required it, in their state of long-continued, incipient famine.

Mrs. Gass entered cordially into Richard's plans. She would have put money wholesale into his new undertaking—or, as she generally expressed it, his new venture; and in truth it might be called new, and

a venture also. But Richard would not have it. Some portion of her capital that had been embarked in the firm of North and Gass, remained in it of necessity—all, in fact, of it that was not lost—but this she reckoned as nothing, and wanted to help Richard further. "It's o' no good crying after spilt milk, Mr. Richard," she said to him, philosophically; "and I've still got a deal more than I shall ever want." But Richard was firm: he would not be helped further: it was a risk, and he preferred to incur it alone.

Perhaps there were few people living that Richard North liked better than Mrs. Gass. He even liked her homely mode of speech; it was honest, genuine; far more to be respected than if she had made a show of attempting what she could not have kept up. Richard had grown to know her worth: he recognized it more surely day by day. In his uncomfortable home at Dallory Hall—which had long to him been anything but a home—he had got into the habit of almost making a second one with Mrs. Gass. Never a day passed but he spent an hour or two of it with her; and she would coax him to remain for meals as often as she could.

He sat one afternoon at her well-spread tea-table. His arrangements were pretty well organized now; and in a day the works would open. The foreign workmen had come, and were lodged with their families in the places appointed for them. Two policemen, paid by Richard, had also taken up their position in Dallory, purposely to protect them. Of course the object of the officers was not made known: Richard North would not be the one to provoke hostilities, or even let it be suspected he feared them; but he was quite aware of the ill-feeling obtaining amidst his former workmen.

"Blessed idiots, they be!" said Mrs. Gass, confidentially, as she handed Richard his cup of tea. "They want a lesson read to 'em, Mr. Richard, that's what it is."

"I can't tell about that," dissented Richard. "I should have thought they could hardly find a better lesson than these last few months must have been."

"Ah, you don't know 'em, as I do, Mr. Richard. I'm a'most double your age, sir; and there's nothing gives one experience like years."

Richard laughed. "Not double my age yet, old friend."

"Any ways, I might have been your mother—if you'll excuse my saying of it," she persisted. "You be hard upon thirty-three, and I'm two years turned fifty."

It was in this plain manner that Mrs. Gass usually liked to make her propositions so undeniable. Certainly she might, so far as age went, have been Richard's mother.

"I know them men better than you do, Mr. Richard; and I say they want a lesson read to 'em yet. And they'll get it, sir. But we'll leave the subject for a bit, if you please. I've been tired of it for some time

past, and I'm sure you have. To watch men, once sensible, act like fools, and persist in acting, spite of everybody and everything, is wearying to one's patience. Is it to-morrow that you open?"

"The day after."

"Well, now, Mr. Richard, I'd like to say another word upon a matter that you and me don't agree on—and it's not often our opinions differs, is it, sir? It's touching your capital. I know you'll want more than you can command: it would be giving me a real pleasure if you'll let me find it."

Richard smiled, and shook his head decisively. "I cannot say more about it than I have said before," was his reply. "You know all I have urged."

"Look here: promise this," returned Mrs. Gass. "If ever you find yourself at a pinch as things go on, say you'll come to me. I don't ask you, if the concern should turn out a losing one, a hopeless one (which I know it won't, unless them precious Trades' Unions sets it a-fire, like the incendiaries they are, and I can call 'em nothing better), for in that case I know cords wouldn't draw you to have help from me. But when you are getting on, and money would be useful, and its employment safe and sure, I shall look for you to come to me. Now, that's enough. I want to put a question, Mr. Richard, that delicacy has kept me from bothering you with before. What about their expenses at Dallory Hall? You can't pretend to keep 'em up."

"Ah," said Richard, "that has been my great nightmare. But I think I see a way through it—at least, in my own mind. First of all, I have given notice to Miss Dallory that we shall not require the lease renewed: it will be up, you know, next March."

"Good," observed Mrs. Gass.

"My father knows nothing of it—it is of no use to trouble him earlier than need be; and of course Madam does not. *She* imagines that the lease will be renewed as a matter inevitable. Miss Dallory will, at my request, keep counsel—or, rather, her brother Francis for her, for it is he who transacts her business."

"They know then that you are the real lessee of Dallory Hall? Lawk a mercy, what a simpleton I be!" broke off Mrs. Gass. "Of course they must have knowed it when the transfer was made."

Richard nodded. "As soon as Christmas turns I shall begin to look out for a moderate house in lieu of the Hall; one that I shall have hopes of being able to keep up. It shall have a good garden for my father's sake. There'll be frightful rebellion on the part of Madam and Matilda, but I can't help that. I cannot do more than my means will allow."

"Look here, Mr. Richard; don't you worry yourself about not being able to keep up a house for Mr. North. I'll do my part to that: all of it, if need be. He and my husband were partners and friends, and grew rich together. Mr. North has lost his savings, but I have kept mine;

and I shall never see him wanting in any comfort while he lives. We'll look out for a pretty villa-cottage with a lovely garden; and he'll be happier in it than he has ever been in that grand big hall. If Madam don't like to bring her pride down to it, let her be off elsewhere—and a good riddance of bad rubbish! I say, though, Mr. Richard, have you heard the news about Mary Dallory?"

"What news?" he asked.

"That she's going to be married to Captain Bohun."

Richard North drank down his tea at a gulp. His face had flushed a little.

"I know that Madam wishes it, and is working for it," he answered.

"Miss Dallory has been staying at Sir Nash Bohun's."

"I hear that Madam has given it out that they're going to marry one another," rejoined Mrs. Gass. "By the way, Mr. Richard, how is Captain Bohun getting on, after his fit of the janders?"

"He is better. Nearly well."

Mrs. Gass took a good bite of buttered toast. "I shall believe in that there marriage when it has took place, Mr. Richard; not before. Unless I'm uncommonly out, Captain Bohun cares for another young lady too well to think of Mary Dallory. Folks mayn't suspect it; and I b'lieve don't. But I have had my eyes about me."

Richard knew that she alluded to Ellen Adair.

"They are both as sweet and good girls as ever lived, and a gentleman may think himself lucky to get either of 'em. Mr. Richard, your coat-sleeve's a-touching of the potted-ham."

Richard smiled a little as he wiped his cuff. Mourning was always bad wear, he remarked, showing every little stain. And then he said a few words about her for whom it was worn—which he had rarely done since she died.

"I cannot get reconciled to her death," he said in a low tone. "At times can scarcely believe in it. To have been carried off after only a day of fever!—it seems incredible."

And Mrs. Gass felt that the words startled her to tremor. She turned away lest he should see it in her countenance.

Bad news arrived from Mrs. Cumberland. Only a morning or two later, a thundering knock at the front door disturbed Jelly and Dinah at their breakfast. Upon its being opened by the latter, Dr. Rane walked straight into the kitchen without ceremony, an open letter in his hand. Jelly rose and curtsied. She had been markedly respectful to the doctor of late, perhaps in very fear lest he should suspect the curious things her mind was running on.

"My mother will be home to-night, Jelly."

"To-night—sir!" exclaimed Jelly in her surprise.

"She is much worse. Very ill indeed. She says she is coming home to die."

Jelly shrieked : startled out of her equanimity.

"It is only three lines—she writes herself," continued Dr. Rane, just showing the letter in his hand, as if in confirmation. "They were to go to London yesterday, stay there the night, and will come home to-day. Of course you will have all things in readiness."

"Yes, sir. And what about meeting my mistress at the station?"

"I shall go myself," said Dr. Rane.

He went away with the last words. Jelly sat still for a few minutes to digest the news, and came to the conclusion that "coming home to die" was but a figure of speech of Mrs. Cumberland's. Then she rose up to begin her preparations, and overwhelmed the bewildered Dinah with fifteen orders at once.

During the day, Jelly, in pursuance of something or other she wanted, was walking at a sharp pace towards Dallory, when in passing the Hall gates she found herself accosted by Mrs. North. Madam was taking her usual promenade in the grounds, and had extended it to the gates. Jelly stood still in sheer amazement; it was the first time within her recollection that Madam had condescended to address herself or any other inhabitant of the neighbourhood.

How was Mrs. Cumberland?—and *where* was she, Madam graciously asked. And Jelly, in the moment's haste, answered that she was at Eastsea.

"To stay the winter, I believe," went on Madam. "And Miss Adair—is she with her?"

"I ought to have said *was* at Eastsea," corrected Jelly, who did not like Madam well enough to be more than barely civil. "My mistress is worse, and is coming home to-day. Miss Adair is with her of course. I must wish you good morning, Madam, I've got my work before me." And away went Jelly, leaving Madam a mental compliment :

"Nasty proud cat ! she had got some sly motive for asking, I know."

And so the day went on.

The early dusk of the autumn evening was beginning to fall, together with a storm of rain, when the carriage containing Mrs. Cumberland stopped at her door. Jelly ran out; and was met by Ellen Adair; who spoke in a frightened whisper :

"Oh Jelly, she is so ill ! she cannot speak."

The doctor stood helping his mother out. Ann was gathering sundry small articles in her arms from beside the driver. Jelly caught one glimpse of her mistress's face and fell back in alarm. Surely that blue look was for death !

"She ought not to have come," murmured Dr. Rane in Jelly's ear.

"Go and ask Seeley to step over—while I get my mother upstairs."

There was some bustle and confusion for the time. Mrs. Cumberland was put in the easy-chair in her room, and undressed, so far as her

bonnet and travelling wraps went. She refused to go to bed. In half an hour, or so, when she had somewhat recovered the fatigue, she looked and seemed considerably better, and spoke a little, expressing a wish for some tea. The doctors left her to take it, enjoining strict quiet. Jelly knelt down before her mistress, to hold the cup and saucer.

"What did she die of, Jelly?" came the unexpected question.

"Who?" asked Jelly, wonderingly.

Mrs. Cumberland made a motion in the direction of her son's house: she and her voice were alike of the faintest. "Bessy Rane."

Jelly gave a start that went well-nigh to upset the tea. She felt her face growing white: but she could not move to hide it.

"Why don't you speak? What did she die of?"

"Ma'am, don't you know? She caught the fever."

"It troubles me, Jelly; it troubles me. I've done nothing but dream of her ever since. And what will Oliver do without her?"

The best he can, Jelly had a great mind to answer. But all she said, was, to beg her mistress to leave these questions until the morning.

"I don't think any morning will dawn for me," was Mrs. Cumberland's remark. "I sent you word I was coming home to die. I wanted to come for many reasons. I knew the journey would do me harm; I put it off too long. But I had to come home: I could not die away from it."

Every consoling thing that Jelly could think of, she said, assuring her mistress it was nothing but the journey that put her on to these low thoughts.

"I want to see Mr. North," resumed Mrs. Cumberland. "You must go and bring him to me."

"Not to-night," said Jelly.

"To-night. Now. There's no time to lose. To see him was one of the things I had to come home for."

And Mrs. Cumberland, ill though she was, was resolute to be obeyed as ever she had been in her days of health. Jelly had the sense to know that refusal would excite her worse than any result of compliance, and prepared to obey. As she passed out of the presence of Mrs. Cumberland, she saw Ellen Adair sitting on the stairs, anxiously listening for any sound from the sick room that might tell how all was going on within it.

"Oh Miss Ellen! You should not be there."

"I cannot rest anywhere, Jelly. I want to know how she is. She is my only friend on this side of the wide world."

"Well now, Miss Ellen, look here—you may come in and stay with her while I am away; I was going to call Ann. But mind you don't talk."

Flinging on a shawl, Jelly started on the run for Dallory Hall. It was an inclement night, pouring with rain. And Ellen Adair took up

her place in obedient silence by the side of the dying woman—for she was dying, however ignorant they might be of the fact. Apart from Ellen's natural grief for Mrs. Cumberland, thoughts of what her own situation would be, if she lost her, could but intrude on her mind, bringing all kinds of perplexity. It seemed to her that she would have neither home nor protector.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RICHARD NORTH'S REVELATION.

FOR a wonder, the dinner-table at Dallory Hall was a solitary one. Solitary, in so far as that only the family then at home sat at it. Madam headed it; Mr. North was at the foot; Richard on one side; Matilda on the other. Scarcely a word was being spoken. Madam was in one of her imperious humours—indeed, when was she out of them?—the servants waited in silence.

Suddenly there rang out a loud crashing peal from the hall-bell. Richard, who was already beginning to be disturbed by vague fears of what his ex-workman's hostilities might bring them to do, sat back in his chair absently, and turned his head.

"Are you expecting any one, Dick?" asked his father.

"No, sir. Unless it be a message to call me out."

It was, however, a message to call out Mr. North; not Richard. Mrs. Cumberland wanted to see him. "On the instant," the servant added: for that was what Jelly had imperatively said.

Mr. North laid down his knife and fork and stared at the man. He did not understand.

"Mrs. Cumberland is at Eastsea," he cried.

"No, sir, she has just got home, and she wants to see you very particular. It's the lady's maid who has brought the message."

"Mr. North cannot go," broke forth Madam loudly to the servant. "Go and say so."

But Jelly, to whom the words penetrated as she stood in the hall, had no notion of her mistress's wishes being set at nought by Madam. She had a great deal of calm moral and physical courage—in spite of the supernatural terrors that had recently held influence over her—some persons might have said her share of calm impudence also: and she made no ceremony of putting her black bonnet, shiny with wet, inside the room.

"My mistress is dying, sir; I don't think there can be a doubt of it," she said, advancing to Mr. North. "She wishes to say a few last words to you, if you'll please to come. There's no time to be lost, sir."

"Bless me!—poor Fanny!" cried Mr. North, rising: and his hands began to tremble a little. "I'll come at once, Jelly."

"You will *not*," spoke Madam, as if she were issuing an imperial edict.

"I must," said Mr. North. "She is dying, Madam, don't you hear?"

"I say No, you will not."

"The wishes of the dying must be respected," interposed Jelly, still to Mr. North. "Otherwise there's no telling what ghosts might haunt 'em after."

The grammar was rather obscure, but the meaning of the words plain enough. Mr. North took a step or two towards the door: Madam came round and put herself before him, with her intercepting words:

"My will is law in this house, and out of it you do not go."

For a minute or two the master (the master!) of Dallory Hall looked utterly helpless, as if he were going to cry like a child. Then he cast an appealing look at his son. Richard rose, laying down his table-napkin.

"Leave the room for an instant," he quietly said to the servants, including Jelly. And they filed out.

"My dear father, is it your wish to see Mrs. Cumberland?"

"Oh, Dick, you know it is," spoke the poor brow-beaten man. "There's not much left to me in life now to care for; but if I let her die without going to her there'll be less."

"Then you shall go," said Richard. Madam turned to him; passion in her eye, and on her tongue.

"How *dare* you attempt to oppose me, Richard North? I say your father shall not go forth at the beck and call of this crazy woman."

"Madam, I say he shall," calmly spoke Richard.

"Do you defy me? Has it come to that?"

"Why, yes, if you force me to: it is not my fault. Pardon me if I speak plainly—if I set you right upon one point, Madam," he added. "You have just said your will is law in the house and out of it: in future it must, on some occasions, yield to mine. This is one. My father will go to Mrs. Cumberland's. Say no more, Madam: it will be useless; and I am going to admit the servants."

From sheer amazement Madam was still. Resolution—the resolution born of conscious power to will and to execute—lay in every tone and glance of Richard North. Before she could collect her energies, the door was opened to the servants, and she heard Richard's order to make ready and bring round the close carriage instantly. Instantly.

"Mr. North will be with your mistress as soon as you are, Jelly," said he. And Jelly nodded, as she took her departure.

But there ensued a scene. Madam had called Mrs. Cumberland a crazy woman: she seemed nothing less than one herself. Whatever her private objection might have been to her husband's holding an interview with Mrs. Cumberland—and there could be no question that she had one—Richard fairly thought she was going mad in her frenzied attempts to prevent it. She stamped, she raved, she threatened Mr. North,

defying him to go, she violently pushed him into his chair backwards, she ordered the servants to bar the house doors against his egress, she rushed round to the stables herself and countermanded the carriage; she was in fact as nearly mad as a woman, short of being a caged lunatic, can be. Matilda cried: indifferent as that young lady remained in general to her mother's ordinary fits of temper, she was frightened now. The servants collected in dark nooks of the hall, and stood peeping: Mr. North stole into his parlour, and thence, by the window, to a bench in the garden, where he sat in the dark and the rain, shaking in every limb. Of his own accord he had surely never dared to go, after this: but Richard was his sheet anchor. Richard alone maintained his calm equanimity, and carried matters through. The servants obeyed his slightest word, only the lift of his finger: with sure instinct they saw who could be, and was, the Hall's real master: and the carriage at length came to the door.

But all this had caused delay. And more might have been caused—for what will an unrestrained and determined woman not do—but that just as the wheels, grating on the wet gravel, struck on Madam's ear, her violence culminated in a kind of fainting-fit. For the time at least she could not move, and Richard took the opportunity to put his father in the carriage. It was astonishing how confidently the old man trusted to Richard's protection. He clung to his hand.

"Won't you come also, Dick? I hardly dare go alone. She'd be capable of coming after me, you know."

Richard's answer was to step in and sit down beside his father. It was eight o'clock when they got to Mrs. Cumberland's. Jelly, with a reproachful face, showed them into a sitting-room.

"You can't go up now, sir; you'll have to wait," said she.

"Is she any better?" asked Richard.

"She's worse," replied Jelly; "getting weaker and weaker with every quarter of an hour. Dr. Rane thinks she'll last till morning. I don't. The clergyman's up there now."

And when the time came for Mr. North to be introduced into the room, Mrs. Cumberland was almost past speaking to him. They were alone—for she motioned others away. Mr. North never afterwards settled with himself what the especial point could have been that she had wished to say to him: unless it was the request that he should take charge of Ellen Adair.

Her words were faint and few, and apparently disjointed, at times seeming to have no connection the one with the other. Mr. North—sitting on a chair close in front of her, holding one of her hands, bending down his ear to catch what fell from her white lips—thought her mind wandered a little. She asked him to protect Ellen Adair—to take her home to the Hall until she should be claimed by her husband or her father. It might be but a few days, she added, before the former

came, and he would probably wish the marriage to take place at once; if so, it had better. Then she went on to say something about Arthur Bohun, which Mr. North could not catch at all. And then she passed abruptly to the past matter of the anonymous letter.

"John, you will forgive it! You will forgive it!" she implored, feebly clasping the hand in which hers lay.

"Forgive that?" returned Mr. North, not in dissent but in surprise that she should speak on the subject.

"For my sake, John. We were dear friends and playfellows in the old days—though you were older than me. You'll forgive it, won't you, John, for my sake: because I am dying, and because I ask it of you."

"Yes I will," said John North: "I don't think as much about it as I did," he added. "I'd like to forgive everybody and everything before I go, Fanny; and my turn mayn't be long now. I forgive it heartily; heartily," he repeated, thinking to content her. "Fanny, I never thought you'd go before me."

"God bless you! God reward you!" she murmured. "There was no ill intention, you know, John."

John North did not see why he merited reward, neither could he follow what she was talking of. It might be, he supposed, one of the hallucinations of mind that sometimes attend the dying.

"I'll take every care of Ellen Adair: she shall come to the Hall and stay there," he said, for that he could understand. "I promise it faithfully to you, Fanny."

"Then that is one of the weights off my mind," murmured the dying woman. "There were so many on it. I have left a paper, John, naming you and Richard her guardians for the time being. She's of good family, and very precious to her father. There has been so short a space to act in: it was only three or four days ago that I knew the end was coming. I did not expect it would be quite so soon."

"It mostly comes when it's not expected," murmured poor John North: "there's a many of us seem to be going very near together. Edmund was the first; then Bessy; now it's you, Fanny: and the next will be me. God in His mercy grant that we may all meet in a happier world, and be together for ever!"

Richard North had remained below in the dining-room with Ellen Adair. The heavy crimson curtains were drawn before the large garden window, a bright fire blazed in the grate. Ellen in her black dress, worn for Bessy, sat in the warmth: she felt very chilly after her journey, was nervous at the turn the illness seemed to be taking; and every now and then a tear stole silently down her sweet face. Richard walked about a little as he glanced at her. He thought her looking, apart from the present sorrow, pale and ill. Richard North was deliberating whether to say a word or two upon a matter that puzzled him. He thought he would.

"I have been across the channel, you know, Ellen, since you left for Eastsea," he began. He had grown sufficiently intimate at Mrs. Cumberland's, after his enforced term of idleness set-in, to drop the formal "Miss Adair" for her Christian name. And she had always called him "Richard": or "Mr. Richard."

"Yes, we heard of it. You went to engage workmen, did you not?"

"Something of that. When I got back home, I found a letter or two waiting for me from Arthur Bohun, who was then at Eastsea. Madam had opened one."

Ellen looked up, and then down again immediately. Richard North saw a change pass over her face, as though she were startled.

"I could not quite understand the letters; I think Arthur intended me not to fully understand them. They spoke of some—some event that was coming off, at which he wished me to be present."

Ellen saw that he did understand: at least, that he believed he did. She rose from her seat and went close to him, speaking in agitation.

"Will you grant me a request, Richard? I know you can be a firm friend; you are very true. Do not ever think of it again—do not speak of it to living man or woman."

"I presume it did *not* take place, Ellen."

"No. And the sooner it is altogether forgotten, the better."

He took her hand between his, and drew her to the fire. They stood before it side by side.

"I am glad you know that I am your firm and true friend, Ellen; you may trust me always. It is neither idle curiosity nor impertinence that makes me speak. Madam stopped it, I conclude."

"I suppose so. She came and fetched him away; James Bohun was dying and wanted him. Since then I—I hardly know. He never came down again. He has been very ill."

"Yes, very. Let him get his health again; it will be all right. That's all, my dear. I should like to take a little care of you as though you were my sister."

"Care!" she replied. "Oh Richard, I don't see what will become of me, or where I shall go. They say Mrs. Cumberland will not live till morning; and papa, you know, is so far away."

Jelly appeared with some coffee; and stayed for a minute or two to gossip, after the bent of her own heart. The carriage and the horses and the coachman were waiting outside in the rain. Dr. Rane was in and out, in his restlessness. It was an anxious night with him. He would, how willingly! have restored his mother for a time, had human skill alone been necessary to do it.

Before the interview with Mr. North was over—and it did not last twenty minutes—Mrs. Cumberland had changed considerably. Her son went into the room as Mr. North left it; and he saw at once how fallacious was the hope he had entertained of her lasting until morning.

Poor Mr. North, broken alike in health and heart, weak in spirit almost as a child, burst into a fit of tears as soon as he entered the dining-room. Richard spoke a few soothing words to him: Ellen Adair, who had rarely, if ever, seen a man cry, stood aghast.

"They are all going, Dicky," he sobbed; "all going one by one. We were a'most boy and girl together; I a big one, Fanny a little mite that I'd often hold on my knee. I loved the child; she was as pretty a little thing as you'd wish to see. She's younger than me by a good deal, and I never thought she'd go before me. There'll be only you left, Dicky; only you."

Ellen touched Richard's elbow: she held a cup of coffee in her hand. "If he can be brought to drink it, it may do him good," she whispered, crying for company.

Mr. North drank the coffee. Afterwards, when he had sat awhile—breaking out ever and anon with the reminiscences of the old days—he said he should like another cup. Richard, as he handed it to him, reminded him that the carriage was waiting; upon which Mr. North, who had quite forgotten the fact, tried to drink it all down at once, and had a fit of choking.

"I'd like to know how she is before I go, Dicky," he said when it was over. "Whether there's any change."

A change indeed. Even as the words left his lips, some slight commotion was heard in the house, following upon Dr. Rane's voice, who had come out of the chamber to speak. The last moment was at hand. Ellen Adair went up, and Jelly went up. Mr. North said he must wait a bit longer.

In five minutes all was over. Ellen Adair, brought down by Dr. Rane, was convulsed with grief. Mr. North said she should go back with them to the Hall, and bade Jelly find what things she might want. At first Ellen refused: it seemed strangely sudden, almost unseemly, to go out of the house thus immediately; but when she came to reflect how lonely and undesirable would be her position if she stayed in it, she grew eager to go. To tell the truth, she felt half afraid to stay: she had never been in personal contact with death, and the idea lay upon her as a dread to be shrunk from.

So a small portmanteau was hastily repacked—not an hour had elapsed since it was unpacked—and taken out to the carriage, Jelly undertaking to send the larger box in the morning. And Ellen was in the carriage driving to the Hall with Mr. North and Richard.

"I am glad to come," she said to them, catching up her breath, "It is so very kind of you to receive me in this extremity."

"Not at all, my dear," answered Mr. North. "The Hall will be your home until we get instructions from your father. Mrs. Cumberland has appointed me and Richard your temporary guardians: I was telling Dick so when you were upstairs."

And Ellen burst into fresh tears, and said again and again how kind it was of them. Richard North felt that he loved her as dearly as any sister.

But there would be words to the bargain : they had not taken Madam into consideration. The supposition that she would object to it, never occurred to Mr. North or Richard ; Madam was so very fond of having company at Dallory Hall. When the coachman, tired of being in the wet, dashed up at a canter, and they descended and entered into the blaze of light, and Madam, standing a little back, saw the young lady and the luggage, her face of surprise was a picture.

"What does this intrusion mean?" she demanded, slowly advancing.

"It means, Madam, that Mrs. Cumberland is dead, and that she has left Miss Adair in my charge and Dick's, for a bit," answered Mr. North with trembling courtesy, remembering the frightful mood he had run away from. While Richard, catching the ominous words and eye of Madam, hastily took Ellen into the drawing-room, introduced her to Matilda, and shut the door on them.

"You say Mrs. Cumberland is dead!" had been Madam's next words to Mr. North.

"Yes, she's dead. It has been frightfully sudden."

"What did she want with you?" resumed Madam, her voice sinking almost to a whisper: and, but that Mr. North was not an observant man, he might have seen her very lips growing white with some dread suspense.

"I don't know what she wanted," he replied—"unless it was the promise from me to take care of Miss Adair. She was nearly past speaking when I got to see her: things had made me late, Madam."

"Did she—did she——. By the commotion that woman, Jelly, made, one would have supposed her mistress had some vast secret to impart," broke off Madam. "Had she?"

"Had who?" asked Mr. North, rather losing the thread of the dialogue.

"Mrs. Cumberland," said Madam, with a slight stamp. And, in spite of her assumed careless petulance, she watched her husband's face for the answer as if she were watching for one of life or death. "Did she impart to you any—any private matter?"

"She had none to impart, Madam, that I am aware of. I shouldn't think she had. She rambled in her talk a bit, as the dying will do: about our old days, and about the anonymous letter that killed Edmund. There was nothing else: except that she wanted me to take temporary charge of Miss Ellen Adair, until we can hear from her father."

Mr. North was too simply-honest to deceive, and Madam believed him. Her old arrogance resumed its sway as fear died out.

"What did she tell you about *him*—the father?"

"Nothing: not a word, Madam: what should she? I tell you her

mind and her speech were both all but gone. She rambled on about the old days and the anonymous letter; and I couldn't follow her even in that; but she said nothing else."

All was right then. The old will and the old arrogance were in full swing now; Madam was herself again.

"Miss Adair goes back to Mrs. Cumberland's to-night," said she. "I do not receive her, or permit her to remain here."

"Eh?—what?" cried Mr. North: and Richard, who had been stepping up, stood still to listen. "Why not, Madam?"

"Because I do not choose to," said Madam. "That's why."

"Madam, I'd not do it for the world. Send her back to the house with the dead lying in it, and where she'd have no protector! I couldn't do it. She's but a young thing. The neighbours would cry shame upon me."

"She goes back at once," spoke Madam in her most decisive tones. "The carriage may take her, as it rains: but, back she goes."

"It can't be, Madam, it can't, indeed. I'm her guardian now, and responsible. I promised that she should stay at Dallory Hall."

And Madam went forthwith into another of her furious rages: she stamped and shook with passion. Not at being thwarted: her will was law always, and she intended it to be so now; but at Mr. North's attempting to oppose it.

"You were a fool for bringing her at all; knowing, as you might, that I should not allow her to stay," stamped Madam. "The Hall is mine: so long as I am mistress of it, no girl, picked up anywhere on a wet night, no brat at fault for a place to put her head in, shall find admittance here. *She goes back at once.*"

Mr. North seemed ready to drop. The piteous look of hopeless despair, piteous in its utter helplessness, laid hold of his face. Richard drew nearer, and he caught sight of him. All this had taken place in the hall under the great lamp.

"Dick, what's to be done?" wailed Mr. North. "I should die of the shame of turning her out again. I wish I could die: I've been wishing it a many times to-night. It's time I was gone, Dick, when I've no longer a roof to offer a poor young lady a week or two's shelter under."

"But you have one, my dear father. At least, I have, which comes to the same thing," added Richard, calmly composed as usual. "Madam"—politely, but nevertheless authoritatively taking Madam's hand to lead her into the dining-room—"will you pardon me if I interfere in this?"

"It is no business of yours," said Madam.

"Excuse me, Madam, but it is. I think I had better take it on myself exclusively, and relieve my father—for really, what with one thing and another, he is not capable of bearing much."

"Oh Dick, do ; do!" interposed poor Mr. North, timorously following into the dining-room. "You are strong, Dick, and I am weak. I was strong once though."

"Madam," said Richard, "this young lady, Miss Adair, will remain here at the Hall until we get instructions from her father."

Madam was turning livid. Richard had never taken such a tone until to-night. And this was the second time ! She would have liked to strike him. Had he been some worthless animal, her manner could not have expressed more gratuitous contempt.

"By what right, pray, do *you* interfere?"

"Well, Madam, Mrs. Cumberland expressed a wish that I, as well as my father, should act as Miss Adair's guardian."

"There's a paper left that says it," eagerly put in Mr. North.

"And what though you were appointed fifty times over, and fifty to that; do you suppose it would give you the right to bring her here—to thrust her into my home?" shrieked Madam. "Don't you believe it, Richard North."

"Madam," said Richard, quietly, "the home is mine."

"On sufferance," was her scornful rejoinder. "But I think the sufferance has been allowed too long."

"You have known me now many years, Madam: I do not think, in all those years, you have found me advance a proposition that I could not substantiate. In saying the home here was mine, I spoke what is literally true. I am the lessee of Dallory Hall. You and my father (my dear father)—turning to him—"I know you will pardon me for the few plain words I must speak) are here on sufferance. My guests, as it were."

"It is every word, Gospel truth," spoke up poor Mr. North, glad to his heart that the moment for her enlightenment had at length come. "Dick holds the lease of Dallory Hall, and he is its real master. For several years now we have all been pensioners on his bounty. He has worked to keep us, Madam, in this his own house; and he has done it nobly and generously."

It seemed to Madam that her brain went whirling about in a maze, for the words brought conviction. Richard the true master! Richard's money that they had been living upon!

"I am grieved to have been obliged to state this, Madam," Richard resumed. "I shall wish never to allude to it further, and I will continue to do the best I can for all. But—in regard to Miss Ellen Adair, she must remain here, and she must be made welcome."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

UNDER THE SAME ROOF.

A CRAFTY and worldly-wise cunning woman, like Mrs. North, can change her tactics as readily as the wind changes its quarters. The avowal of Richard—that he was the true master of Dallory Hall, so far as holding all power, to act, in his hands went—had been the greatest blow to her of any she had experienced in all these later years. It struck, don't you see, the death-warrant of *her* power: for she knew that she should never be allowed to rule again with an unjust and iron hand, as it had been her cruel pleasure to do. In all essential things, where it was needful for him to interfere, she felt that Richard's will and Richard's policy would henceforth outsway her own.

Madam sat in her dressing-room that night, looking into the future. Or, rather, striving to look. But it was very dim and misty. The sources whence she had drawn her large supplies were gone; the unlimited power was gone. Would it be worth while for her to remain at the Hall, she questioned, under the altered circumstances. Since the death of James Bohun, and her short sojourn with Sir Nash, an idea had occasionally crossed her mind that it might be desirable to take up her residence with the baronet—if she could only scheme to accomplish it. From some cause or other, she had formerly not felt at ease when with Sir Nash; but that was wearing off. At any rate, a home in his well-appointed establishment would be far preferable to Dallory if its show and expense could not be kept up; and all considerations gave way before Madam's own selfish interest.

Already Madam tasted of deposed power. Ellen Adair was to remain at the Hall, and—as Richard had emphatically enjoined—to be made welcome. Madam shut her teeth and her hands fiercely as she thought of it. Ellen Adair—whom she so hated and dreaded! She lost herself in a speculation of what Richard might have done had she persisted in her refusal. Would he have taken up his power in the hearing of the servants, and said, I am your true master; you must obey my decrees now, things must be according as I wish them? Would he have said to Madam, This is my house, and you must either fall in with my wishes, or—there's the door and you can walk out of it? She had been too wise to provoke this: and had yielded an acquiescence, tacitly at any rate, to the stay of Ellen Adair.

But, as Madam sat there, thinking of this, thinking of that, a doubt slowly loomed into her mind, whether it might not, after all, be the best policy for Ellen Adair to be at the hall. The dread that Arthur Bohun might possibly renew his wish to marry her, in spite of all that had been said and done, lay occasionally on Madam. In fact, it had never left her. She could not make a child of Arthur and keep him at her apron-

string ; he was free to go hither and thither at will : and, no matter in what spot of the habitable globe Ellen might be located, there was no earthly power that could stop his going to her if he wished it. Why then, surely it *was* safer and better that the girl should be under her own eye, always in her own immediate presence. Madam laughed a little as she rose from her musings ; she could have found in her heart to thank Richard North for bringing this about.

And so, with the morning, Madam was quite prepared to be gracious to Ellen Adair. Madam was one of those accommodating people who are ready, as we are told, to hold a candle to a certain nameless personage, if they think their interest may be served by doing it. Matilda North, who knew nothing whatever of Madam's special reasons for disliking Miss Adair—save that she had heard her mother once scornfully speak of her as a low, nameless young woman, a nobody—was coldly civil to her on Richard's introduction. But the sweet face, the gentle voice, the superior manners, won even on her ; and when the morning came Matilda felt rather glad that the present monotony of the Hall was relieved by such an inmate, and asked her all about the death of Mrs. Cumberland.

And thus Ellen Adair was located at Dallory Hall. But Mrs. North had not bargained for a cruel perplexity that was to fall upon her ere the day was over : no less than the return to it of Captain Bohun.

It has been mentioned that Sir Nash was ailing. In Madam's new scheme, undefined and incomplete though it was at present—that of possibly taking up her residence in his house—she had judged it well to inaugurate it by trying to ingratiate herself into his favour so far as she knew how. She would have liked to make herself necessary to him. Madam had heard a hint broached of his going over to certain springs in Germany, and, as she knew she should never get taken with him there, though Arthur might, she just schemed a little to keep him in England. During the concluding days of her stay with him, Sir Nash had been overwhelmed with persuasions that he should come down to Dallory Hall, and get up his health there. To hear Madam talk, never had so salubrious a spot been discovered on the earth's surface, as Dallory : its water was pure, its air a species of tonic in itself ; for rural calmness, for simple delight, it possessed attractions never before realized save in Arcadia. Sir Nash, in answer to all this, had not given the least hope of trying its virtues ; and Madam had finally departed believing Dallory would never see him.

But on this morning, the one after Ellen Adair's arrival, Madam, amidst other letters, got one addressed to her in her son Arthur's handwriting. According to her frequent habit of late—though why she had fallen into it, she could not herself have told—she let her letters lie, unlooked at, until very late in the morning ; just before luncheon, she opened them ; Arthur's the last : she never cared to hear from *him*. And then

Madam opened her eyes as well as the letter. She read that Sir Nash had come to a sudden resolution to accept her proffered hospitality for a short time; and that he and Arthur would be with her that day. Now, at this very moment of reading, they were absolutely on their road to Dallory Hall.

Madam sat staring. Could she stop it, was her first thought. It was very undesirable that they should come. Ellen Adair was there: and, after this new and startling revelation of Richard's, Madam was not quite sure that she might continue to crowd the house with guests at will. But there was no help for it; ransack her fertile brain as she would, and did, there seemed no possible chance of preventing the travellers' arrival. Had she known where a message would reach them, she might have telegraphed that the Hall was burning, or yellow fever had broken out in it.

Mrs. North was not the first who has had to make the best of an unlucky combination of circumstances. She gave orders amidst her servants to prepare for the reception of the guests; and descended to the luncheon table with a smooth face, saying there not a word. Richard was out, or she might have told him: he was so busy over the re-opening of those works of his, that he was only at home now night and morning. It happened, however, that on this day he had occasion to come home for some deed of agreement that lay in his desk.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon—a showery one—and Richard North was approaching the gates of the Hall with the long swinging step of a man of business, when he saw some one approach them more leisurely from the other side. It was Mary Dallory. He did not know she had come back; and his face had certainly a flush of surprise on it, as he lifted his hat to greet her.

"I got home yesterday evening," she said, smiling. "Forced to it. Dear old Frank wrote the most woe-begone letters imaginable, saying he could not get on without me."

"Did you come from Sir Nash Bohun's?" asked Richard.

"Sir Nash Bohun's! No. What put that in your head? I was at Sir Nash Bohun's for a few days some ages ago—weeks, at any rate, as it seems to me—but not lately. I have been with my aunt in South Audley Street."

"London must be lively at this time," remarked Richard rather sardonically; as if, like Francis Dallory, he resented her having stayed there.

"Very. It *is*; for the tourists and people have all come back to it. I suppose you'd have liked me to stay here and catch the fever. Very kind of you! I was going in to see your father."

He glanced at her with a half-smile and held out his arm after passing the gates.

"I am not sure that I shall take it. You have been very rude, Mr. Richard."

Richard dropped it at once, begging her pardon. His air was that of a man who has received a disagreeable check. But Miss Dallory had been joking only; she glanced up at him, and a hot flush of vexation over-spread her face. Richard held it out once more, and they began talking as they went along. Some drops were beginning to fall, and he put up his umbrella.

He told her of Mrs. Cumberland's death. She had not heard of it, and expressed her sorrow, of course. But she had had no acquaintance with Mrs. Cumberland, could not remember to have seen her more than once, and that was three years ago: and the subject passed.

"I hear you have begun business again," she said.

"Well—I might answer you as Green, my old time-keeper, answered me to-day. I happened to say to him, 'We have begun once more, Green:' 'Yes, in a sort, sir,' said he, gruffly. I have begun 'in a sort,' Miss Dallory."

"And what kind of 'sort' is it?"

"In just as cautious and quiet a way as it is well possible for a poor man to begin," answered Richard. "I have no capital, as you must be aware; or, at least, as good as none."

"I daresay you could get enough of that if you wanted it. Some of your friends have plenty of it, Mr. Richard."

"I know that. Mrs. Gass quarrels with me every day, because I will not take hers, and run the risk of making ducks and drakes of it. No. I prefer to feel my way, alone; to stand or fall by myself, Miss Dallory."

"I have heard Richard North called obstinate," remarked the young lady, looking into the damp air.

"When he believes he is right. I don't think it is a bad quality, Miss Dallory. My dear sister Bessy used to say——"

"Oh Richard, what about her?—what of Bessy?" interrupted Mary Dallory, all ceremony thrown to the winds at the mention of the name. "I never was so painfully shocked in all my life as when I opened Frank's letter telling me she was dead. What *could* have killed her?"

"It was the fever, you know," answered Richard, sadly. "I never shall forget what I felt when I heard it. I was in Belgium."

"It seemed very strange that she should die so quickly."

"It seems strange to me still. I have not cared to talk about her since: she was my only sister and very dear to me. Rane says it was a most violent attack: and I suppose she succumbed to it quickly, without much struggle."

"That poor little Cissy Ketlar is gone, too."

"Yes."

"Is Ketlar one of the few men who have gone back to work?"

"Oh dear no."

"Do you know I should like to shake those men until they came to their senses?"

The rain had ceased: but they were walking on, unconscious of it, under the umbrella. By-and-by the fact was discovered, and the umbrella put down.

"Who's this?" exclaimed Richard. "Visitors for Madam, I suppose."

Richard alluded to the sound of carriage wheels behind. He and Miss Dallory had certainly not walked as though they were winning a wager, but they were close to the house now; and reached its door simultaneously with the carriage. Richard stood in very amazement, when he saw its inmates—Arthur Bohun, thin and sallow; and Sir Nash.

There was a hasty greeting, a welcome, and then they all entered together. Madam, Matilda, and Miss Adair sat in the drawing-room. Arthur came in side by side with Miss Dallory; he was holding her hand; they were talking together, and a slight flush illumined his thin face. Ellen, feeling shy amidst them all, remained in the back ground: she would not press forward: but a general change of position brought her and Arthur close to each other; and she held out her hand timidly, with a rosy blush.

He turned white as death. He staggered back as though he had seen a spectre. Just for a minute he was utterly unnerved; and then, some sort of presence of mind returning to him, he looked another way without further notice, and began talking again with Miss Dallory.

But Miss Dallory had no longer leisure to waste on him. *She* had caught sight of Ellen, whom she had never seen, and was wonderfully struck. Never in her whole life had she found a face so unutterably lovely.

"Mr. Richard"—touching his arm, as he stood by Arthur Bohun, and the young lady had to stretch before Arthur to get to it—"who is that young lady?"

"Ellen Adair."

"Is *that* Ellen Adair! Oh what a sweet face it is! I never saw one so lovely. Do take me to her, Mr. Richard."

Richard introduced them. Arthur Bohun, his bosom beating with shame and pain, turned to the window: a sick faintness was stealing over him; he was very weak yet. How he loved her!—*how* he loved her! More; ay, ten times more, as it seemed to him, than of yore. And yet, he must only treat her with coldness; worse than if she and he were strangers. What untoward mystery could have brought her at Dallory Hall? He stole away, on the plea of looking for Mr. North. Madam, who had all her eyes about her and had been using them, followed him out.

There was a hasty colloquy. He asked why Miss Adair was there. Madam replied by telling (for once in her life) the pure truth. She

favoured him with a short history of the previous night's events that had culminated in Richard's assumption of will. The girl was there, as he saw, concluded Madam, and she could not help it.

"Did Mrs. Cumberland reveal to her before she died what you told me about—about her father?" enquired Arthur, from between his dry and feverish and trembling lips.

"I have no means of knowing. I should think *not*, for the girl betrays no consciousness of it in her manner. Listen, Arthur," added Madam, impressively laying her hand on his arm. "It is unfortunate that you are subjected to be in the same house with her; but I cannot, you perceive, send her from it. All you have to do is to avoid her: never allow yourself to speak to her; never be for a moment alone with her. You will be safe then."

"Yes, it will be the only way," he mechanically answered, as he quitted Madam, and went on.

Meanwhile Ellen Adair little thought what cruelty was in store for her. Shocked though she had been at the first moment by Arthur Bohun's apparent non-recognition, it was so improbable a rudeness for *him* to be capable of, in his almost ultra-native courteousness, even to a stranger, that she soon decided he had purposely not greeted her until they should be alone, or else had really not recognized her.

In crossing the hall an hour later, Ellen met him face to face. He was coming out of Mr. North's parlour; she was passing it towards a door that led to the grounds at the back. No one was about; they were quite alone.

"Arthur," she softly said, smiling at him and putting out her hand.

He went red and white, and hot and cold. He lifted his hat, which he happened to be wearing, having come straight in through the glass doors, and politely murmured some words that sounded like "I beg your pardon, Miss Adair." And then he turned short round, and traversed the room back to the garden, putting on his hat again.

It seemed to her as though she had received her death-blow. There could no longer be any doubt or misapprehension after this, as to what the future was to be. Every drop of blood in her body seemed to rush to her heart and set it beating: the feeling was one akin to terror. Ellen Adair crept into the drawing-room, empty then, and leaned her aching brow against the window frame.

Presently Matilda North entered. The young lady had her ins and outs of curiosity the same as her mother, and fancied some great sight was to be seen. She increased her speed.

"What are you looking at, Miss Adair?"

"Nothing," answered Ellen, lifting her head. And in truth she had not been looking out at all.

"Ah, I see," significantly spoke Miss North.

Walking slowly side by side along a distant path, went Captain

Bohun and Miss Dallory. Matilda, acting on a hint from Madam, would not let slip the opportunity.

"Captain Bohun is losing no time, is he?"

"In what way?" enquired Ellen.

"Don't you know that they are engaged? He is to marry Miss Dallory. We had all kinds of love passages, I assure you, when he was ill at my uncle's, and she was there helping me to nurse him."

"And they—do you say they are engaged?" murmured poor Ellen.

"Of course. It will be a love match too, for he is very fond of her—and she of him. I think Richard was once a little bit *gone* in that quarter; but Arthur has put him out. Sir Nash is so pleased at Arthur's choice; so is mamma: they are both very fond of Mary Dallory."

And that all-but completed ceremony only a few weeks back in the church at Eastsea!—and the ring and licence she held in store still!—and the deep deep love they had owned to each other, and vowed to maintain for ever—what did it all mean? Ellen Adair asked the question of herself in her agony. And as her heart returned the common-sense answer—fickleness; faithlessness—she felt as if a great sea of fire were scorching away hope and peace and happiness. The iron had entered into her soul.

(To be continued.)



IN THE FIRE-LIGHT.

ALONE, yes, alone in the old room together !

Without,—there is darkness and plashing of rain ;
The bleak wind goes wailing across the wet heather,
And wildly the laurel-boughs dash at the pane :
Within,—there is fire-light that flickers and darkens,
Like flashes of hope leaping up from despair ;
The hound at your feet pricks his ears as he hearkens
To all those weird voices that moan through the air.

Ah me, the red gleam,—how it quivers and lingers
Around the bright head with its tresses of gold !
It lights up the gems on the slender white fingers,
And touches the robe in each amethyst fold :
Long years have not palèd the beauty that tinges
Your cheek with the delicate pink of the shell,
And still the brown eyes wear the brown silken fringes
Half veiling the glance I remember so well.

Together once more,—to be parted to-morrow !
What brings back the visions that haunt me to-night ?
No thrill of old feeling,—no touch of old sorrow
Can shadow *your* life-dream of summer delight ;
When sky-larks are singing, and May blossoms blushing,
Come, show me the woman who pauses to shed
One tear for the dry leaves her footfall is crushing—
Sere leaves of last autumn, all trampled and dead !

Together once more,—in the room where we plighted
The vows that are broken,—the troth that is lost !
And here, in the midst of a life you have blighted
I pardon your falseness,—whatever it cost :
My heart has resigned you,—it only remembers
The long, bitter sorrow,—the years of unrest ;—
As sinks the last gleam in those dull, fading embers,
The last flame of passion goes out in my breast !

SARAH DOUDNEY.

GETTING HOME FROM GERMANY.

IT was Sunday, the 24th of July, and I was at Meran—that wonderfully favoured spot—bearing the intense heat of the day as quietly as possible. Every now and then a few drops of rain would come down, cooling the pavement for an instant, and disappear again under the burning rays of the sun ; or a clap of thunder roll lazily over our heads, we below little dreaming that the artillery of the earth was even then preparing itself to thunder forth with probably a far more awful and disastrous result. There was something still and sad about the day ; it seemed almost too oppressive to breathe freely, and the people moved about with a languid step that accorded well with the fine, voluptuous beauty of their dark Southern faces. I was seated at a window, looking on at the passing scene ; listening to the clashing of church bells ; watching the nuns in and out of a convent opposite, admiring the gracefulness of their costume, as they moved about in thin veils and rich black silk hoods that came down to their feet ; watching the women as every now and then they fell down upon their knees in obedience to a sharp-toned bell that rang out at intervals ; counting the number of passengers that went out in the diligences, looking at their various faces and wondering what life-history each face could disclose, and what they were going off for : until, at one o'clock, in obedience to the summons, I repaired to the Speise-saal, and found myself at the table-d'hôte, one of a small parti-carré of four.

My vis-à-vis was an elderly man, with a pleasant, refined face, and rather polished manners. In obedience to the German custom, he bowed as he sat down, and immediately entered into conversation. He had lately been to the Ammergau Passion Play, and did not know how to praise it sufficiently. "Perhaps you have seen it also?" he remarked.

"No," I replied, "but I hope to do so next Sunday. I have written for rooms and tickets, and secured them."

"You are wise," he said. "Those who leave it to chance and the last moment often fare badly in both respects."

In the first instance there had been many scruples to overcome before I could persuade myself to be present at the play, and I told him so. For the highest, the most sacred, and most solemn of all subjects to be so handled, had seemed little short of mockery or blasphemy ; looking at it, at any rate, from a hasty point of view.

"I can understand your objections," he answered ; "more especially as belonging to an Englishman ; but I do not think you will retain them

if you look at the thing in a right light. It is a religious play, or ceremony, performed by religious people. The principal characters must be men known to be good and upright; otherwise they would not be admitted. It is not performed merely for the love of gain. It has now existed for centuries, and was first instituted, I am told, in consequence of a vow made by the inhabitants of the village. A plague or fever had visited Partenkirchen, a place some miles away; the people were dying by wholesale, and it was forbidden that any one should visit Ammergau until the plague had ceased. One young man, however, disobeyed the command, and entered Ammergau in the dead of night to spend Sunday with his sweetheart. He carried the infection with him, and in three days eighty-two of the villagers were dead. Those still well went up to the church in a body, and recorded a vow that if God would mercifully remove the plague from them they would, every ten years, represent each event in the life of our Lord. The tradition is, that though after this vow a few people were seized with illness, not one died. Ever since, the play has been performed in the most solemn and religious manner. Its effect upon the people is evident. They are superior to the ordinary race of peasants; they are good, religious, simple-minded. The expenses of the play, which amount to about £3,000, are first paid out of the proceeds; a small sum is then given to each actor, and the remainder is devoted to some useful object—chiefly to the repairing of a wall against the inroad of a small stream."

"What was the effect of the play upon your own mind?" I inquired.

"It appealed throughout to my better nature. Not once was I shocked; not once had I to say 'that would have been well left out.' Not a movement of irreverence was visible throughout, and no such feeling was communicated to the mind."

"And upon the people themselves—the peasants? What of them?"

"It does them more good, I verily believe, than would thousands of sermons. It brings home to their understandings and their hearts all these truths with so much force and reality that they can but be the better for them. Oh, go and see it for yourself, by all means, and you will not repent it."

We were departing the next day, Monday, for Innsbruck, en route to Munich, and from thence should proceed to Ober-Ammergau. My vis-à-vis informed me that it was his intention to remain in Meran until the Tuesday, his final destination being Hamburg.

Monday morning rose cloudy, but without rain, and by seven o'clock I was in an open carriage on the road to Botzen. Passing over the bridge at Meran, I took a last look around me, sad at bidding good-bye to such glorious, such magnificent scenery. The surrounding mountains were clothed with the most beautiful trees and verdure; here and there bold rocks reared their noble heads, crowned with some

castellated building that had stood the test of ages. At the very summit of one of the mountains, almost out of sight, is the castle of Fragsburg; and from below it appeared inaccessible. But it was in perfect repair and inhabited. Far away to my right hand, perched upon a jutting rock, surrounded by verdure, was the Schloss Tyrol, which gave the name originally to the country. In the old days, when the Counts could boast of little more territory than the valley of the Vintschgau from Botzen to the Inn, and a part of the Engadine, Meran was the capital of the Tyrol. Now it has given place to Innsbruck, a larger and more important town, but, in spite of its reputation for beauty, very far inferior in this respect to Meran: that is to say, in point of situation. The impression it has left behind is almost that of a dream; a vision of beauty long gone by which comes back to the mind with a kind of shadowy reality. Fresh glories opened up at every step of the road. The vineyards were enough to drive one speechless: for two reasons: their loveliness, and the sight of the unripe grapes. Alas! poor fox! how he must have suffered, in spite of his attempts at consolation. After these it is hard to give any praise to the vineyards on the banks of the Rhine. When seen for the first time, years ago, they created a terrible feeling of disappointment. The hop-gardens of England are more picturesque, though they do not bear fruit. But these vineyards of the South—who that has not seen them can imagine their beauty? It is not possible to describe them. The vines are trained upon layers of wood, crossed and recrossed from the tops of poles, forming a species of trellis-work about six feet from the ground. Above, the leaves form a canopy of beautiful green, stretching away out of sight. Beneath, the grapes may be seen, thousands and tens of thousands of bunches drooping in the most graceful manner from the leaves. The intervening space between the hanging grapes and the ground is free from obstruction, forming an endless natural chamber, cool, and shaded from the sun. The earth appears full of glories, which few can realize whose lives, for the most part, are spent in crowded cities; glories that to see must make a man better and stronger in soul and spirit, so forcibly do they show forth the wonderful power and wisdom and goodness of God.

The road from Meran to Botzen was full of these wondrous sights. Presently Terlan was passed, with its leaning tower. It has sunk four feet on one side, on the other seven. The feeling created when immediately beneath it was anything but pleasant, and it seemed surprising that anyone could be found to live in a large, white house to which the tower every moment seemed threatening destruction.

"Now," thought I, as we left the village, "for a first sight of the glorious dolomite mountains!" An angle was turned, and lo, nothing but clouds! The disappointment was hard to bear. Here and there their rough, jagged outlines might be traced, but the greater part were

enveloped in mist. A good many olive-trees were passed, a few pomegranate and lemon trees, and then Botzen was soon reached. In aspect the town was very Italian, and so far was picturesque; the people, too, looked Southern, and the language of Italy was a good deal spoken: but much of the cleanliness to be observed in most German towns and villages was wanting.

The Innsbruck train did not start for half an hour, and ere many minutes had elapsed my acquaintance of yesterday walked into the waiting-room.

"You here!" I exclaimed, ceremony and politeness giving way to astonishment. "I thought you stayed in Meran until to-morrow."

"We never know what a day may bring forth," he replied quite gravely. "Such was my intention, but France has declared war against Prussia; and I must hasten home, or run the risk of being stopped on the way."

"What!" I exclaimed, falling back upon the velvet cushions, which luckily were not without springs: "war—war, did you say? It cannot be true. This is the first I have heard of it."

"The first a good many have heard of it," he retorted. "But it is true for all that. And a terrible war it will be. It is a sad and wicked thing."

"But how get back to England?" I cried. "And what about the Ammergau play?"

He shook his head. "If you are anxious to return to England, I advise you to do so without delay. Come with me up to Hamburg, or take the route through Switzerland. As for Ammergau, I expect there will be no more representations this year. The man who takes the principal character is a soldier; so are others. I am not sure but Judas (a quiet, inoffensive fellow with a red beard, with whom I lodged) is one also."

It was impossible but that disappointment and vexation should be excessive; it was hard to forgive the Emperor for not delaying his declaration one week. But the thing was done, and there remained only to make the best of it.

Innsbruck was reached at five o'clock, and all tidings were confirmed, all doubts set at rest. Everybody was packing up and preparing for flight; and the hotel keepers looked depressed and out of humour. The next day we went on to Munich, and found that pleasant place in a state of great commotion, and more warlike than it had ever appeared. How to get back to England was a question asked on all sides, and as usual advice was very contradictory. I wished to take Hamburg, but there was a doubt about getting out of the port. In the uncertainty I called at the English Minister's for an opinion. With due respect to her Majesty's representative, I sent in my card, and was ushered into the presence of a secretary, who informed me, with a great

amount of condescension, that the only route they could recommend was by way of Geneva. Upon suggesting Hamburg, he passed his hand across his forehead, and said the idea had not struck him; but no doubt Geneva was the safest.

With a bow and thanks I quitted the atmosphere of official greatness, determined to give up Hamburg for Switzerland. And the decision proved fortunate.

That evening I started for Augsburg. The station at Munich was a scene of the greatest confusion. With no small difficulty I managed to get tickets and step into the train as it was moving off. One or two officers were in the carriage, and a gentleman not in uniform. He had evidently been crying, for his eyes were red and swollen. He was a fine, good-looking young fellow, and as the train started I heard him tell some friends on the platform that he had left his mother almost brokenhearted. We entered into conversation, and he said he was going to join the army. As we parted at Augsburg I wished him a safe and speedy return.

"Thank you—very much," he answered, smiling for the first time. "I hope so, but everything is dark and uncertain just now." And then he disappeared in the crowd.

At Augsburg we had an hour or two to wait for the train, and I fell in with a young, intelligent American lad who continued to be my companion as far as Zurich. The station was crowded with troops, and the third-class waiting-room was a more painful scene than one would care often to witness. The room was large, but so crowded that it was difficult to thread one's way about. Groups in all attitudes met the eye. Some of the men lay on the ground fast asleep, worn out with heat and travelling, and perhaps emotion. Others were seated on benches, their arms locked round wives, sweethearts, mothers, sisters, as the case might be; some had their heads buried on their breasts, the attitude being that of despair. Many were crying; and, not ashamed of their tears, made no attempt at concealment; most had red eyes. Some were shouting, some had their heads down on the tables; numbers had long ceased to be sober, and looked wild and desperate, a sight from which to shrink. Outside they were lying or sitting on the steps; more rational these, and quieter, but all looking miserable. The attitude of one poor old woman seated away from every one else will not be easily forgotten. She had evidently accompanied her son as far as Augsburg, from some village, and he must have gone on by a previous train. She might have been sixty years of age, and was dressed neatly and cleanly, wearing the broad black hat of a peasant. Her face was buried in her hands, but every now and then it was raised upwards with an expression of deep and painful sorrow. Poor woman! hers was but one case out of many thousands. I watched her on and off for some time. At last she seemed to remember herself, and just as

a train was on the point of motion darted across the rails, and was hastily pushed into a carriage by one of the guards. One longed to go up to her and give her a few words of hope and encouragement, but there are times when grief must be left to itself.

At last our train came in; and, without sorrow, Augsburg and its burden of care were soon left behind. The American lad evidently did not intend to lose sight of me, for he had followed very closely into an empty compartment. Poor fellow! he had left Dresden two days before for Lucerne, expecting to reach it by the direct route, without let or hindrance. But the exigencies of the war had detained him; and, fearful of funds failing, he was undoubtedly starving himself in the hope of counterbalancing the extra travelling expenses. He was at school in Dresden, and was to meet his friends at Lucerne. We all know what it is to a growing schoolboy of fifteen to be placed upon short allowance.

Our next destination was Lindau, and it was reached at seven o'clock in the morning, after a long but interesting night journey. In about half an hour the steamboat started for Rorschach, and the voyage across the green waters of lake Constance was delightful and refreshing. The calm water, the stillness of the atmosphere in the early morning, were inexpressibly soothing, and after so many hours of travel on the rapid, shaking railroad seemed to one's spirit like the pouring of oil upon a troubled sea. But it did not last long: an hour and a quarter had scarcely passed when the steamer touched Rorschach, and there proved to be still an hour and a half to spare before the train left for Zurich.

"Come," I cried to my young acquaintance; "these golden moments must not be wasted. We have work to do." We both looked—well, as people do look after hours and hours of travel on a hot, dusty, smoky road. I was hungry; and the boy's face was enough to tell that he was.

"You are famished," I said, accusing him point blank.

"No, sir; only—"

"Only what?"

"Well," he returned, "I feel a little queer here," tapping his chest; "but I think it's only—only the dirt. If I could get a wash it would put me all right."

"No doubt. Of course you couldn't eat any breakfast? A beef-steak, for instance, and bread and butter, and honey, and coffee, and——"

His eyes glistened and his mouth watered. "Please don't," he pleaded. "You make me feel a great deal worse."

I said no more, but dragged him off with me, not unwillingly on his part, to an hotel, where a substantial repast was prepared as quickly as possible. Meanwhile we made great friends with soap and water, and soon after entered the dining-room in triumph.

The time passed rapidly, as it generally does when pleasant work is going on, and at half-past nine the train for Zurich came up to the station. The day was intensely hot, and the construction of the Swiss railway carriages was fully appreciated. They are built somewhat on the American principle, but have first, second, and third class compartments. Pleasant and cool were they; far more so than those on the English and French railways, and consequently infinitely more comfortable. The windows were all down, and the aspect could be seen almost as easily as from an open carriage. At five o'clock Zurich was reached, and it was a cause of congratulation to find that it would not be necessary to go as far down as Geneva.

"Every one was passing by way of Neuchâtel and Pontarlier," said the chef-de-gare. "As yet no obstruction had been offered along the line." The station was tolerably clear from confusion. A great many Swiss troops were on the platform, but they were quiet and orderly. The Neuchâtel train started in half an hour. The American lad, finding I should not have to go on to Geneva, looked blue and desponding, but we parted excellent friends.

The first part of the next stage was uncomfortable. The train was crowded. The compartment I entered was almost filled with an American party, who talked and laughed in accents rather grating to sensitive ears. One of them was recounting to a pretty girl his experiences at a gaming-table. He had won twenty Louis; left the table, gone back, lost them and four more besides. Her exclamations of delight at his good fortune, and of dismay at his reverses, were worth listening to. At Neuchâtel they filled the whole of a large omnibus, and their quantity of luggage was so enormous that our own omnibus, after waiting twenty minutes, was obliged to go off with its passengers and return a second time to the station. "A pretty penny they will have to pay for surplus," said a parchment-looking, exasperated Englishwoman in an enormous mushroom hat, who, by her costume, appeared to have mistaken the day for the fifth of November: "serve 'em right."

Upon first entering the station many had been surprised to perceive it profusely decorated with festoons and garlands of flowers and evergreens; and as we drove through the town triumphal arches and decorations met the eye at every turn. "Is it for the war?" asked some one of a French lady belonging to the place.

"On the contrary," she answered. "They were for a fête, and the war has put a stop to it. Now they appear nothing but a mockery."

A mockery indeed, with their festive look and their texts inscribed to peace and plenty; and the people seemed to think the sooner they were down the better. But what with the effect of the decorations, the position of Neuchâtel, and the beauty of its lake, it was impossible to be otherwise than delighted with the place, or to leave it the next morning without regret. "But you had better go," the station-master had said

the previous night. "I cannot answer for the line being open from one hour to another. Get into France as quickly as you can."

So the next morning found me once more on the road homeward. In due time we reached Pontarlier, and there, having had my luggage visited by a good old woman who kindly saved me the trouble of opening it, I passed away the remaining ten minutes in paying my respects to a bottle of lemonade and some of the most delicious apricots in the world. Then back to the carriage, but minute after minute passed, and still we moved not. "What is the matter?" I called out to a guard on the platform.

"Monsieur," he replied, "a train is missing. It left the last station some time ago, and has not since been heard of. It is lost. They fear an accident. Run off the rails, perhaps."

"Poor train!" exclaimed a lively little Frenchwoman in the same compartment. "It has lost itself, has it? An elopement, it may be. Of course you will offer a reward?"

The guard laughed, and would doubtless have replied, but at that moment the missing convoi came steaming slowly up, filled with troops, the engine and carriages decorated with green boughs, as if the passengers were out for a day's holiday. About twice the proper number of men had been stowed away into each compartment, and they were singing and shouting in the most reckless manner. As our train moved off, a Frenchman held out a bottle of wine. "Tenez," he said, "*une bouteille de vin pour boire ma santé.*" And about a hundred hands, and half as many heads were thrust out, with a perfect roar of delight, to seize upon the treasure.

Our own train was none of the quietest. It also was filled with troops, almost every compartment being thus occupied, with the exception of one for "Ladies only." Into this I had happened to get, but with a look of horror a procession of half a dozen guards, headed by the station-master, came up and turned me out again, looking at me as if I had been a real live gorilla, or some other wild and untamed animal. Luckily, I found a carriage occupied by officers, and here passed a tolerably comfortable journey up to Dijon.

As we neared that town the banks were lined with soldiers, many of them so near the train and so reckless that every moment seemed to threaten some awful accident. Once in the station one felt in the midst of the war. It was so crowded with troops that it seemed hardly possible to get through. The Paris express would not start for six hours, and I made the best of my way to the Hôtel de Jura, just in time to sit down to a capital table d'hôte.

The fine old town was like a fair. Soldiers and vivandières, followed by armies of boys, were going about the streets, singing; every window was alive with heads; every café full of men, some drinking, some too far gone even for that. Gradually wending my way towards the cathedral,

I found it a scene of as great, though quieter and more subdued, excitement. A dense crowd of men and women thronged the building and the approach to it. The bells were clashing out, their deep tones vibrating in the air. "What is it all about?" I inquired, when, after some difficulty, I found myself under the north doorway.

"Monseigneur l'Evêque has just returned from Rome," replied a woman, who by dint of hard work had that moment got possession of a chair. "We are all assembled to welcome him home."

"How long has he been absent?"

"Eight months."

It would be rather pleasant to see Monseigneur l'Evêque, and watch his reception; but how to catch a glimpse of him? It seemed an impossibility. Looking up I chanced to behold the empty pulpit, just over the line of procession. "If I could but get to it!" I thought, and began to thread my way, like an eel, through the mass. At length the stairs were reached, the pulpit mounted, and a fine view obtained of the whole building, far above the sea of heads. Many eyes were turned up, astonished, no doubt, at the unparalleled audacity. Some distance below stood the suisse: he grew purple in the face, and flourished his staff, the picture of indignant horror: but it was impossible for so much dignity and gold lace to make a way through the press. And the coolness with which I was able to set at nought his authority and keep my place, was, I believe, near driving him into an apoplectic seizure.

Presently a subdued murmur, a shout outside, the drawing up of a carriage, announced the arrival of the bishop. In another moment the procession, headed by the indignant and humiliated suisse, ascended the church. The bishop was a little man with a pale, beautiful face, in which might be read the evidence of a good life. Though seventy-eight years old, he looked but little over sixty. He blessed the people as he walked, and after a short time spent at the altar, approached the pulpit. I went down to the foot then, and so had what I was longing for—a good, close look into his face. In a few touching words, which set half the people crying, he told them how glad he was to find himself once more amongst them; how he had longed for the moment; how he thanked God for permitting him at his great age to return in safety, though in the midst of so many desolating scenes. He touched slightly upon the war; said that come what would, France would be true to herself; would retire from the conflict pure, brave, and he hoped victorious. Then he begged them to remember that he was aged, and worn out with his long journey, and could say but little; and very soon he had come down and passed away again. To be near him, to look into his face, to listen to the tones of his voice, was a thing never to be forgotten.

But time was going on, and I quickly found myself once more at the station. It was now approaching midnight. The scene was worse

than it had been five hours ago ; more crowded with soldiers. As night advanced some had got tired out, others grown more excited. Every inch of ground seemed covered with them ; hundreds were lying down in every attitude, in a dead sleep. One man was parading about with an enormous paper flag stuck at the end of a long pole, upon which a hideous face was sketched in black ink, and the words "Vive la France ! A bas Bismarck !" Another had managed to clear himself a space, and was blowing a fife and spinning round and round like a top, to the delight of his half-sober confrères. Presently down he fell with a smack that seemed to shake the room ; and there he lay, stunned, stupid, half dead. Trains came pouring in, unloading men of every description ; some Turks, some Algerians, some from all parts of the dominions. Many of them resembled wild beasts rather than human beings, and it was hard to look at them without horror. One poor sister of mercy, who had had a coupé given up to her, was terrified by an invasion of half a dozen of these rough men ; in spite of her entreaties they pushed themselves past her into the carriage. Nor would they come out again until forced to do so by the under station-master and some of the officials. Then the poor sister was reinstated and locked in.

As fast as trains came up others went out, crammed to suffocation with these living freights of humanity in its lowest type. Many of the men, half sober, broke into the waiting-rooms, driving the porters nearly wild during their endeavours to turn them out ; sending the ladies up into corners like flocks of frightened sheep.

At last, an hour behind time, up came the express. "Now for a long, uncomfortable journey," were the words that echoed around. The train was sure to be crowded, and for the rest of the night we should have to sit bolt upright, like stone effigies. Crowded it certainly was ; so much so that luckily it was found necessary to put on an extra carriage for the Dijon passengers. To my great relief I was fortunate enough to secure to myself an empty coupé by paying the extra fee, and was thus able to pass the journey with some degree of ease.

Paris was reached just half an hour too late for the tidal train. The capital was, if possible, in a state of yet greater excitement. The Gare du Nord was crowded with troops, as were its neighbouring streets and boulevards. It was but a repetition of the old scenes ; men lying in all directions, singing, shouting, some quite drunk, others parting from friends and relatives with heavy hearts, but here trying to look brave. Having four hours to wait, I crossed over to the hotel for a wash and a breakfast, and watched the scenes. "It makes one's heart ache," said the sentimental waiter, putting his hand to his side. "Sir, since more than a week I palpitate for the poor wretches, for I know how many will never return. If it were not for my forty years, my wife, and ten children——"

"Ten children!" I exclaimed, "and you a Frenchman!"

"Monsieur," he returned, with a sigh, "I have had three wives. My present wife is a *bien belle femme*, but she unfortunately has an infirmity of temper."

"No wonder," I interrupted, "with ten children to manage."

"Hélas! oui. C'est la misère. Mais que voulez-vous, M'sieu? But as I was saying; this war makes one's heart ache. If it were not for my forty years and other incumbrances, I would join the army. I feel that I should distinguish myself."

"Have you ever been a soldier?"

"Never. I had the good chance to draw a high number."

Breakfast over, I went out; and though the heat was melting, took a drive through some parts of Paris. The cocher had either watched through the night, or was overcome by the power of the sun, for every now and then he would fall asleep while driving, to the great peril of himself and of all concerned; and I had to divide my attention between the streets and the making pokes in his back with a strong umbrella to keep him awake.

At twelve the Calais train started, and Paris once left behind, all signs of the war were virtually over. But what a commotion I had passed through for the last week! what excitement, what tears, what misery, what an exhibition of human nature in some of its best and worst phases! And all the work of one man, so to speak. Or, of two men, let us say, if you like it better. France says the onus lies with Germany; Germany retorts, and says it lies with France: to us outsiders, it appears to be altogether a rather remarkable exemplification of that homely old proverb—the pot calling the kettle black. A fortnight previous, everything had looked calm, stable, quiet: the image and reflection of peace. The world was going on in its usual daily walk and work; looking out for harvest, laying plans for winter, happy in its inoffensive cares and pleasures. No one dreamt of a change. None went about looking solemn and speaking in hushed tones, as one often does in the strange calm that sets in before the bursting of a great storm. Engagements were entered into for days and weeks and months to come; and then, suddenly as an eagle swoops down upon its prey, came the order which broke up the homes and wrung the hearts of the "Fatherland." To many it must have brought sensations something like those, which, in the days gone by, overtook the inhabitants of Pompeii, when the mighty volcano burst forth and buried the unhappy men and women in a living grave.

It was an interesting and exciting journey to come through all these signs and preparations of war. I do not deny it. Had it been possible, I would have given much to remain amongst them and follow to the seat of war. But, to all not destitute of feeling and sympathy towards their fellow creatures, the experience of these first

days, and their visible effect upon thousands of men, hurried away at a moment's notice, were painful in the last degree. No doubt they would soon become outwardly calm, brave, warlike; but it was my lot to see them in their weakest moments: moments trying to all men, but especially so to those who have not the reserve and self-control of the English. Everyone I met was of one opinion: no matter how the war ended, it must be disastrous to Europe. The misery and consequences it will entail can as yet be but imperfectly conjectured; it would be vain to attempt to realize them. Both French and Prussians were thirsting for battle; both sides wanted to fight it out to the last breath; each was determined upon victory. And each possessed advantages sufficient to make the result doubtful. But one thing we know: the destinies of nations are not in the keeping of any earthly power: and all things must work together for the fulfilment of the Divine will. As for England, to keep her place as mistress of the world, now and in all time, she has but to be true to herself; to the faith and opinions of her forefathers: but if these things are forgotten—and many of the old landmarks seem to be giving way to new—depend upon it she will sooner or later share the fate of ancient Rome, or classic Athens, and pass away for ever from her high estate.

A long, tedious journey of seven hours, and Calais was reached. The following day I set foot once more on the shores of old England, and soon found myself happy amongst "old, familiar faces."

And this is the second time in four years that I have been driven home from Germany by war.

August, 1870.



A TALE OF SIN.

IT was a lovely place, that homestead of Chavasse Grange, as seen in the freshness of the summer's morning : and my lady Chavasse, looking from her window as she dressed, might be thinking so. The green lawn, its dew drops sparkling in the sun, was dotted with beds of many-coloured flowers ; the thrush and blackbird were singing in the surrounding trees ; the far-off landscape stretched around in the distance was beautiful for the eye to rest upon.

Nearly hidden by great clusters of roses, some of which he was plucking, and talking at the same time to the head gardener who stood by, was a well-looking gentleman of some five-and-twenty years. His light morning coat was flung back from the snowy white waistcoat, across which a gold chain passed, its seal drooping ; a blue necktie just as blue as his blue eyes, was carelessly tied round his neck. He might have been known for a Chavasse by those self-same eyes, for they had been his father's—Sir Peter—before him.

"About those geraniums that you have put out, Markham," he was saying. "How came you to do it? Lady Chavasse is very angry : she wanted them kept in the pots."

"Well, Sir Geoffry, I only obeyed orders," replied the gardener—who was new to the place. "Lady Rachel told me to do it."

"Lady Rachel did? Oh very well. Lady Chavasse did not understand that, I suppose."

Up went Lady Chavasse's window at this juncture. "Geoffry."

Sir Geoffry stepped out from amid the roses, and smiled as he answered her.

"Ask Markham about the geraniums, Geoffry—how he could dare to do such a thing without orders."

"Mother, Rachel bade him do it. Of course she did not know that you wished it not done."

"Oh," curtly replied Lady Chavasse. And she shut down the window again.

By this it will be seen that the wishes of the two ladies at Chavasse Grange sometimes clashed. Lady Rachel, though perhaps regarded as second in authority, was fond of having her own way, and took it when she could. Lady Chavasse made a show of deferring to her generally ; but she had reigned queen so long that she found it irksome, not to say humiliating, to yield the smallest point to her son's wife.

They were sitting down to breakfast when Sir Geoffry went in, in the room that had once been the garden-parlour. It had been re-embel-

lished since those days, and made the breakfast-room. Lady Chavassee was but in her forty-fourth year; a young woman, so to say, beautiful still, and excellently well preserved. She wore a handsome dress of green muslin, with a dainty little cap of lace on her rich brown hair. Sir Geoffrey's wife was in white; she looked just the same as when she was Lady Rachel Derreston; her perfect features pale and cold and faultless.

Geoffrey Chavassee laid a rose by the side of each as he sat down. *He* was the only one changed: changed since the light-hearted days before that episode of sin and care came to the Grange. It had soon passed away again; but somehow it had left its mark on him. His face seemed to have acquired a weary kind of look; and the fair bright hair was getting somewhat thin upon the temples. Sir Geoffrey was in Parliament; but he had now paired off for the very short remainder of the session. Sometimes they were all in London: sometimes Sir Geoffrey would be there alone; or only with his wife: the Grange was their chief and usual home.

They began talking of their plans for the day. Sir Geoffrey had to ride over some portion of the estate; Lady Rachel thought she must write some letters; Lady Chavassee, who said her head ached, intended to go out in her new carriage.

It was ordered to the door in the course of the morning: this pretty toy carriage, which had been a recent present from Geoffrey to his mother. Low and light in build, it was something like a basket chaise, but much more elegant, and the boy-groom, in his natty postilion's dress, sat the horse. Lady Chavassee, a light shawl thrown over her green muslin, and a white bonnet on, stood admiring the turn-out, her maid, who had come out with the parasol, by her side.

"Wilkins," said her ladyship suddenly, "run and ask Lady Rachel whether she is sure she would not like to go with me?"

The woman went, and returned. "Lady Rachel's love and thanks, my lady, but she would prefer to get her letters done."

So Lady Chavassee went alone, taking the road to Church Dykely. The hedges were blooming with wild roses and woodbine, the sweet scent of the hay filled the air, the sky was blue and cloudless. But the headache was making itself sensibly felt; and my lady, remembering that she had often had these headaches lately, began wondering whether Duffham the surgeon could give her anything to cure them.

"Giles," she cried, leaning forward. And the boy-groom turned and touched his cap.

"My lady?"

"To Mr. Duffham's."

So in the middle of the village, at Mr. Duffham's door, Giles pulled up. The surgeon, seeing who it was, came out, and handed his visitor in.

Lady Chavasse had not enjoyed a gossip with Mr. Duffham since before her last absence from home. She rather liked one in her coldly condescending way. And she stayed with him in the surgery while he made up some medicine for her, and told her all the village news. Then she began talking about her daughter-in-law.

"Lady Rachel seems well, but there is a little fractiousness of temper perceptible now and then; and I fancy that, with some people, it denotes a state of not perfect health. There are *no* children, Mr. Duffham, you see. There are no signs of any."

"Time enough for that, my lady."

"Well—they have been married for—let me recollect—nearly fourteen months. I do hope there will be children! I am anxious that there should be."

The surgeon happened to meet her eyes as she spoke, and read the anxiety seated in them.

"You see—if there were none, and anything happened to Sir Geoffry, it would be the case of the old days—my case over again. Had my child proved to be a girl, the Grange would have gone from us. You do not remember that; you were not here; but your predecessor, Mr. Layne, knew all about it."

Perhaps it was the first time for some three or more years past that Lady Chavasse had mentioned voluntarily the name of Layne to the surgeon. It might have been a slip of the tongue now.

"But there's nothing likely to happen to Sir Geoffry, Lady Chavasse," observed Duffham after an imperceptible pause. "He is young and healthy."

"I know all that. Only it would be pleasant to feel we were on the safe side—that there was a son to succeed. I cannot help looking to contingencies: it has been my way to do so all my life."

"Well, Lady Chavasse, I sincerely hope the son will come. Sir Geoffry is anxious on the point I daresay."

"He makes no sign. Sir Geoffry seems to me to have grown a little indifferent in manner of late, as to general interests. Yesterday afternoon we were talking about making some improvements at the Grange, he and I; Lady Rachel was indoors at the piano. I remarked that it would cost a good deal of money, and the question was, whether it would be worth while to do it. 'My successor would think it so, no doubt,' cried Sir Geoffry. 'I hope that will never be Parker Chavasse; I should not like him to reign here,' I said. 'If it is, mother, I shall not be alive to witness it,' was his unemotional answer."

"Lady Chavasse, considering the difference between the admiral's age and Sir Geoffry's, I should say there are thirty chances against it," was Duffham's reply, as he began to roll up the bottle of mixture in white paper.

While he was doing this, a clapping of tiny hands attracted Lady

Chavasse's attention to the window, which stood open. A little boy had run out of Mrs. Layne's door opposite, and stood on the pavement in admiration of the carriage, which the boy-groom was driving slowly about. It was a pretty child of three years old, or thereabouts, in a brown holland pinafore strapped round the waist, his little arms and legs and neck bare, and his light hair curling.

"Oh g'andma, look ! G'andma, come and look !" he cried—and the words were wafted distinctly to Lady Chavasse.

"Who *is* that child, Mr. Duffham ? I have seen him sometimes before. Stay, though, I remember—I think I have heard. He belongs to that daughter of Mr. Layne's who married the soldier of the same name. A lieutenant, or some grade of that kind."

"Lieutenant Layne then ; Captain Layne now," carelessly replied Mr. Duffham. "Hopes to get his majority soon, no doubt."

"Oh indeed. I sometimes wonder how people without family connections manage to obtain rapid promotion. The grandmother takes care of the child, I suppose. Quite a charge for her."

Mr. Duffham, standing now by her side, glanced at Lady Chavasse. Her countenance was open, unembarrassed : there was no sign of ulterior thought upon it. Evidently a certain event of the past was not just then in her remembrance.

"How is the old lady ?"

"Middling. She breaks fast. I doubt, though, if one of her daughters will not go before her."

Lady Chavasse turned quickly at the words.

"I speak of the one who is with her—Miss Elizabeth Layne," continued Mr. Duffham, busily rolling up the bottle. "Her health is failing : I think seriously."

There was a pause. Lady Chavasse looked hard at the white knobs on the drug drawers. But that she began to speak, old Duffham might have thought she was counting how many there were of them.

"The other one—Miss Mary Layne—is she still in that situation in India ? A governess, or something of the kind, we heard she went out to be."

"Governess to Captain Layne's children. Oh yes, she's there. And likely to be, the people over the way seem to say. Captain and Mrs. Layne consider that they have a treasure in her."

"Oh I make no doubt she would do her duty. Thank you : never mind sealing it. I will be sure to attend to your directions, Mr. Duffham."

She swept out to the carriage, which had now drawn up, and stepped over the low step into it. The surgeon put the bottle by her side, and saluted her as she drove away. Across the road trotted the little fellow in the pinafore.

"Did oo see dat booful tarriage, Mis'er Duffham ? I'd like to 'ide in it."

"You would, would you, Master Arthur," returned the surgeon, hoisting the child for a moment on his shoulder, and then setting him on his feet again, as Miss Layne appeared at the door. "Be off back: there's Aunt Elizabeth looking angry. It's against the law, you know, sir, to run out beyond the house."

And the little lad ran over at once obediently.

Nearly three years back—not quite so much by a month or two—Church Dykely was gratified by the intelligence that Captain Layne's wife—who was then sojourning in Europe—was coming on a short visit to her mother with her three or four weeks' old baby. Church Dykely welcomed the news, for it was a sort of break to the monotonous, jog-trot village life, and warmly received Mrs. Richard Layne and the child on their arrival. The infant was born in France, where Mrs. Richard Layne had been staying with one of her sisters—Mary—and whence she had now come direct to her mother's; Mary having gone on to Liverpool to join Mrs. Richard Layne's other children. The baby—made much of by the neighbours—remained with old Mrs. Layne: Mrs. Richard Layne did not deem it well to take so young a child to India, as he seemed rather delicate. Church Dykely said how generous it was of her to sacrifice her motherly feelings for the baby's good—but the Laynes had always been unselfish. And Baby Arthur, as all the place called him, lived and thrived, and was now as fine a little fellow for his age as might be, with a generous spirit and open heart. My Lady Chavassee (having temporarily forgotten it when speaking with Mr. Duffham) had heard all about the child's parentage just as the village had—that he was the son of Captain Richard Layne and his wife Susan. Chavassee Grange generally understood the same, including Sir Geoffry. There was no intercourse whatever between the Layne family and the Grange; there had not been any since Miss Mary Layne quit-
ted it. My Lady Chavassee was in the habit of turning away her eyes when she passed Mrs. Layne's house: and in good truth, though perhaps her conscience reminded her of it at these moments, she had three parts forgotten the unpleasant episode of the past.

And the little boy grew and thrived: and became as much a feature in Church Dykely as other features were—say the bridge over the mill-stream, or the butcher's wife—and was no more thought of than they.

Miss Elizabeth Layne caught hold of the young truant's hand with a jerk and a reprimand, telling him he'd be run over some day. She had occasion to tell it him rather often, for he was of a fearless nature. Mr. Duffham nodded across the road to Miss Elizabeth.

"Are you better to-day?" he called out. People don't stand on much ceremony in these rural places.

"Not much, thank you," came the answer.

For Miss Elizabeth Layne had been anything but strong lately; her symptoms looking very like those that herald in consumption.

II.

The time rolled on, bringing its changes. Elizabeth Layne died. Mrs. Layne grew very feeble, and it was thought and said by everybody that one of her daughters ought to be residing with her. There was only one left unmarried—Mary. Mary received news in India of this state of things at home, together with a summons from her mother. Not at all a peremptory summons. Mrs. Layne wrote a few shaky lines, praying her to come "if she'd not mind returning to the place:" if she did mind it, why she, the mother, must die alone as she best could. There was a short struggle in Mary Layne's heart; a quick, sharp battle, and she gave in. Her duty to her mother lay before aught else of obligation in God's sight; and she would yield to it. As soon as preparations for her voyage could be made, she embarked for England.

It was autumn when she got home, and Church Dykely received her gladly. Mary Layne had always been a favourite in the place from the time her father, the good hearted, hard-working surgeon, had fondly shown her, his youngest and fairest child, to the public, a baby of a few days old. But Church Dykely found her greatly changed. They remembered her as a blooming girl; she came back to them a grave woman, looking older than her years; and with a pale sweet countenance that seemed never to have a smile on it. She was but six and twenty yet.

Miss Layne took up her post at once by the side of her ailing mother. What with attending her and attending to Baby Arthur—whom she took into training at once just as she had the children in India—she found her time fully occupied. The boy, when she returned, was turned five. She went out very rarely; never—except to church, or at dusk—when the family were at the Grange, for she seemed to have a dread of meeting them. Church Dykely wondered that Miss Layne did not call at the Grange, considering that she had been humble companion there before she went out, or that my lady did not come to see her; but supposed the lapse of time had caused the acquaintanceship to fall through.

Mary had brought good news from India. Her sister Eleanor, Mrs. Allan McAlpin, had a little girl, to the great delight of all concerned. Just when they had given it up as a bad job, and decided that it was of no good to hope any longer, the capricious infant arrived. Major Layne told his wife confidentially that Allan McAlpin was prouder of that baby than any dog with two tails.

And henceforth this was to be Mary Layne's home, and this her occupation—the caring for her mother, so long as the old lady should be spared, and the gentle leading to good of the child, Arthur. Mrs. Layne, lapsing into her dotage, would sit in her favourite place, the parlour window, open when the weather allowed it, watching people as they passed. Mary's smooth and bright brown hair might be seen in the

background, her head drooping over the book she was reading to Mrs. Layne, or over her work when the old lady got tired of hearing, or over Master Arthur's lessons at the table. Not only lessons to fit him for this world did Mary teach him; but such as would stand him in good aid when striving on for the next. Twice a day, morning and evening, would she take the child alone, and talk to him of Heaven, and things pertaining to it. Aunt Elizabeth's lessons had been mostly on the score of behaviour: the other kind of instruction had been all routine at the best. Mary remedied this: and she had an apt little scholar. Seated on her knee, his bright blue eyes turned up to her face, the child would listen and talk, and say he would be a good boy always, always. The tears wet his eyelashes at her Bible stories: he would put his little face down on her bosom, and whisper out a sobbing wish that Jesus would love *him* as he had loved the little children on earth. There is no safeguard like this seed sown in childhood: if withheld, nothing can replace it in after life.

They grew the best and greatest friends, these two. Whether Mary loved him, or not, she did not say; she was ever patient and thoughtful with him, with a kind of grave tenderness. But the child grew to love her more than he had ever loved anyone in his young life. One day, when he did something wrong and saw how it grieved her, his repentant sobs nearly choked him. It was very certain that Mary had found the way to his heart, and might mould him for good or for ill.

The child was a chatterbox. Aunt Elizabeth used to say he ought to have the tip cut off his tongue. He seemed never tired of asking about papa and mamma in India, and Allan and Bobby and the rest, and the elephants and camels—and Dick the eldest, who was in London, at the school attached to King's College.

"When will they come over to see us, Aunt Mary?" he questioned one day, when he was on Mary's knee.

"If grandmamma's pretty well we will have Dick down at Christmas."

"Is Dick to be a soldier like papa?"

"I think so."

"I shall be a soldier too."

There was an involuntary tightening of her hands round him—as if she would guard him from *that*."

"I hope not, Arthur. One soldier in a family's enough; and that is to be Richard."

"Is papa a very big, big, brave man with a flashing sword?"

"Major Layne is tall and very brave. He wears his sword sometimes."

"Oh Aunt Mary, I should like to be a soldier and have a sword! When I can write well enough I'll write a letter to papa to ask him. I'd like to ride on the elephants."

"They are not as good to ride as horses."

"Is mamma as pretty as you?" demanded Master Arthur after a pause.

"Prettier. I am pale and"—sad, she was going to say, but put in another word—"quiet."

"When you go back to India, Aunt Mary, shall you take me? I should like to sail in the great ship."

"Arthur, dear, I do not think I shall go back."

And so Miss Mary Lane—she was Miss Layne now—stayed on. Church Dykely would see a slender, grave young lady, dressed generally in black silk, whose sweet face seemed to have too care-worn an expression for her years. But if her countenance was worn and weary, her heart was not. That seemed full of love and charity for all; of gentle compassion for any wrong-doer, of sympathy for the sick and suffering. She got to be revered, and valued, and respected as few had ever been in Church Dykely: certainly as none had, so young as she was. Baby Arthur, clacking his whip as he went through the street on his walks by the nurse-girl, Betsey's, side, his chattering tongue never still; now running into the blacksmith's shed to watch the sparks; now perching himself on the top of the village stocks; and now frightening Betsey out of her senses by attempting to leap the brook—in spite of these out-door attractions, Baby Arthur was ever ready to run home to Aunt Mary, as though she were his best treasure.

When Miss Layne had been about six months at her mother's, a piece of munificent good fortune befel her—as conveyed to her in official and non-official communications from India. Andrew McAlpin—the head of the great McAlpin house in Calcutta; who had respected Mary Layne above all women, and had wished to marry her, as may be remembered—Andrew McAlpin was dead, and had left some of his accumulated wealth to Mary. It would amount to six hundred a year, and was bequeathed to her absolutely; at her own disposal to will away when she in turn should die. In addition to this, he directed that the sum of one thousand pounds should be paid to her at once. He also left a thousand pounds to Mrs. Richard Layne—but that does not concern us. This good man's death brought great grief to Mary. It had been the result of an accident: he lay ill but a few weeks. As to the fortune—well of course that was welcome, for Mary had been casting many an uneasy thought to the future on sundry scores, and what little money she had been able to put by, out of her salary as governess at Major Layne's, was now nearly exhausted. She thought she knew why Mr. McAlpin had thus generously remembered her: and it was an additional proof of the thoughtful goodness which had ever characterised his life. Oh if she could but have thanked him! if she had but known it before he died. He had been in the habit of corresponding with her since her return to Europe, for she and

he had remained firm friends, but the thought of ever benefiting by him in this way had never entered her head. As how should it?—seeing that he was a strong man, and only in the prime of life. She mourned his loss; she thought she could best have spared any other friend; but all the regrets in the world would not bring him back to life. He was gone. And Allan McAlpin was now sole head of the wealthy house, besides inheriting a vast private fortune from his brother. Eleanor McAlpin, once Eleanor Layne, might well wish for more children amidst all her riches.

The first thing Mary Layne did with some of this thousand pounds—which had been conveyed to her simultaneously with the tidings of the death—was to convey her mother to the seaside for change, together with baby Arthur and the nurse, Betsey. Before quitting home she held one or two interviews with James Spriggings, the house agent, builder, and decorator, and left certain orders with him. On their return, old Mrs. Layne did not know her house. It had been put into substantial and ornamental repair inside and out, and was now one of the prettiest, not to say handsomest, in the village. All the old carpets were replaced by handsome new ones, and a good portion of the shabby old furniture was removed for new.

“My dear, why have you done it?” cried Mrs. Layne, looking about her in amazement. “Is it not a waste of money?”

“I think not, mother,” was the answer. “Most likely this will be my home for life. Perhaps Arthur’s home after me. At least it will be his until he shall be of an age to go out in the world.”

Mrs. Layne said no more. She had got of late very indifferent to outward things. Old people do get so, and Mr. Duffham said her system was breaking up. The seaside air had done her good; they had gone to it in May, and came back in August. Mary added a third servant to the household, and things went on as before in their quiet routine.

One afternoon in September, when they had been at home about a month, Mary went out, and took Arthur. She was going to see a poor cottager who had nursed herself, Mary, when she was a child, and who had recently lost her husband. When they came to the gates of Chavasse Grange, past which their road lay, Master Arthur made a dead standstill, and wholly declined to proceed. The child was in a black velvet tunic, the tips of his white drawers just discernible beneath it, and his legs bare, down to the white socks. As bonny a boy for his six years as could be seen anywhere, with a noble, fearless bearing. Mary wore her usual black silk, a rich one too, with a little crape on it; the mourning for Mr. McAlpin. Arthur was staring over the way through the open gates of the Grange.

“I want to go in and see the peacock.”

“Go in and see the peacock!” exclaimed Miss Layne, rather struck

aback by the demand. "What can you mean, Arthur?—The peacock is up by the house."

"I know it is. We can go up there and see it, Aunt Mary."

"Indeed we cannot, Arthur. I never heard of such a thing."

"Betsey lets me go."

The confession involved all kinds of thoughts, and a flush crossed Miss Layne's delicate face. The family were not at the Grange, as she knew: they had gone up to London in January when Parliament met, and had never returned since: but nevertheless she did not like to hear of this intrusion into the grounds of the nurse and child. The peacock had been a recent acquisition; or, as Arthur expressed it, had just "come to live there." When he had talked of it at home, Mary supposed he had seen it on the slopes in passing. These green slopes, dotted here and there with shrubs and flowers, came down to the boundary wall that skirted the highway. The avenue through the gates wound round abruptly, hiding itself beyond the lodge.

"Come, my dear. It is already late."

"But, Aunt Mary, you *must* see the peacock. He has got the most splendid tail. Sometimes he drags it behind him on the grass, and sometimes it's all spread out in a round, like that fan you brought home from India. Do come."

Miss Layne did not reply for the moment. She was inwardly debating upon what plea she could forbid the child's ever going in again to see the peacock: the interdiction would sound most arbitrary if she gave none. All at once, as if by magic, the peacock appeared in view, strutting down the slopes, its proud tail, in all its glory, spread aloft in the rays of the declining sun.

It was too much for Arthur. With a shout of delight, he leaped off the low foot-path, flew across the road, and in at the gates. In vain Mary called: in his glad excitement, he did not so much as hear.

There ensued a noise as of the fleet foot of a horse, and then a crash, a man's shout, and a child's cry. What harm had been done? In dire fear, Mary Layne ran to see, her legs trembling under her.

Just at the sharp turn beyond the lodge, a group stood: Sir Geoffry Chavasse had Arthur in his arms: his horse, from which he had flung himself, being held and soothed by a mounted groom. The lodge children also had come running out to look. She understood it in a moment: Sir Geoffry must have been riding quickly down from the house, his groom behind him, when the unfortunate little intruder encountered him just at the turn, and there was no possibility of pulling up in time. In fact, the boy had run absolutely on to the horse's legs.

She stood, white, and faint, and sick, against the wall of the lodge: not daring to look into the accident—for Mary Layne was but a true woman, timid and sensitive; as little daring to encounter Sir Geoffry Chavasse, whom she had not been close to but for a few months short

of seven years. That it should have occurred!—that this untoward thing should have occurred!

"I wonder whose child it is?" she heard Sir Geoffry say—and the well-remembered tones came home to her with a heart-thrill. "Poor little fellow! could it have been my fault, or his? Dovey"—to the groom—"ride on at once and get Mr. Dufham here. Never mind my horse: he's all right now. You can lead him up to the house, Bill."

The groom touched his hat, and then his horse, and rode past Mary on his errand. Sir Geoffry was already carrying the child to the Grange. Bill, the eldest of the lodge fry, following with the horse. All in a minute, a wailing cry burst from Arthur.

"Aunt Mary! Aunt Mary! oh let her come! I want Aunt Mary."

And then it struck Sir Geoffry Chavasse that a gentleman's child, such as this one by his appearance evidently was, would not have been out without an attendant. He turned round, and saw a lady in black standing by the lodge. The wailing cry set in again.

"Aunt Mary! I want Aunt Mary."

There was no help for it. She came on with her agitated face, from which every drop of blood had faded. Sir Geoffry, occupied with the child, did not notice her much.

"I am so grieved," he began; "I trust the injury will be found not to be very serious. My horse—"

He had lifted his eyes then, and knew her instantly. His own face turned crimson; the words he had been about to say died unspoken on his lips. For a moment they looked in each other's faces, and might have seen, had the time been one of less agitation, how sorrowful care had left its traces there. The next, they remembered the present time, and what was due from them.

"I beg your pardon: Miss Layne, I think?" said Sir Geoffry, contriving to release one hand and raise his hat.

"Yes, sir," she answered, and bowed in return.

He sat down on the bank for a moment to get a better hold of the child. Blood was dripping from one of the little velvet sleeves. Sir Geoffry, carrying him as gently as was possible, made all haste to the house. The window of what had been the garden-parlour stood open, and he took him into it at once. Ah, how they both remembered it! It had been refurnished and made grand now: but the room was the room still. Sir Geoffry had returned home that morning. His wife and Lady Chavasse were not expected for a day or two. Scarcely any servants were as yet in the house; but the woman who had been left in charge, Hester Picker, came in with warm water. She curtsied to Miss Layne.

"Dear little fellow!" she exclaimed, her tongue ready as of old. "How did it happen, sir?"

"My horse knocked him down," replied Sir Geoffry. "Get me some linen, Picker."

The boy lay on the sofa where he had been put, his hat off, and his pretty light brown hair falling from his face, pale now. Apparently there was no injury save to the arm. Sir Geoffry looked at Mary.

"I am a bit of a surgeon," he said. "Will you allow me to examine his hurt as a surgeon would? Duffham cannot be here just yet."

"Oh yes, certainly," she answered.

"I must cut his velvet sleeve up."

And she bowed in acquiescence to that.

Hester Picker came in with the linen. Before commencing to cut the sleeve, Sir Geoffry touched the arm here and there, as if testing where the damage might lie. Arthur cried out.

"That hurts you," said Sir Geoffry.

"Not much," answered the little fellow, trying to be brave. "Papa's a soldier, and I want to be a soldier, so I won't mind a little hurt."

"Your papa's a soldier? Ah, yes, I think I remember," said Sir Geoffry, turning to Mary. "It is the little son of Captain Layne."

"My papa is Major Layne now," spoke up Arthur before she could make any answer. "He and mamma live in India."

"And so you want to be a soldier the same as papa?" said Sir Geoffry, testing the basin of water with his finger, which Picker was holding, and which had been brought in full hot.

"Yes I do. Aunt Mary there says No, and grandmamma says No : but—oh what's that?"

He had caught sight of the blood for the first time and broke off with a shuddering cry. Sir Geoffry was ready now, and had the scissors in his hand. But before using them he spoke to Miss Layne.

"Will you sit here while I look at it?" he asked, putting a chair with its face to the open window and its back to the sofa. And she understood the motive, and thanked him; and said she would walk about outside.

By and by, when she was tired of waiting, and all seemed very quiet, she looked in. Arthur had fainted. Sir Geoffry was bathing his forehead with eau de Cologne; Picker had run for something in a tumbler, and wine stood on the table.

"Was it the pain?—did it hurt him very badly?" asked Mary, supposing that the arm had been bathed and perhaps dressed.

"I have not done anything to it; I preferred to leave it for Duffham," said Sir Geoffry—and at the same moment she caught sight of the velvet sleeve laid open, and something lying on it that looked like a mass of linen. Mary turned even whiter than the child.

"Do not be alarmed," said Sir Geoffry. "Your little nephew is only faint from the loss of blood. Drink this," he added, bringing her a glass of wine.

But she would not take it. As Sir Geoffry was putting it on the table, Arthur began to revive. Young children are elastic; ill one minute, well the next; and he began to talk again.

"Aunt Mary, are you there?"

She moved to the sofa and took his uninjured hand.

"We must not tell grandmamma, Aunt Mary. It would frighten her."

"Bless his dear little thoughtful heart!" interjected Hester Picker.

"Here comes something."

The something proved to be a fly, and it brought Mr. Duffham. Before the groom had reached the village, he overtook this said fly and the surgeon in it, who was then returning home from another accident. Turning round at the groom's news—"Some little child had run against Sir Geoffry's horse, and was hurt"—he came up to the Grange.

When Mr. Duffham saw that it was *this* child, he felt curiously taken to. Up the room and down the room, looked he; then at Sir Geoffry, then at Miss Layne, then at Hester Picker, saying nothing. Last of all he walked up to the sofa and gazed at the white face lying there.

"Well," said he, "and what's this? And how did it happen?"

"It was the peacock," answered Arthur. "I ran away from Aunt Mary to look at it, and the horse came."

"The dear innocent!" cried Hester Picker. "No wonder he ran. It's a love of a peacock."

"Don't you think it was very naughty, young sir, to run from your aunt?" returned Mr. Duffham.

"Yes, very. Because she had told me not to. Aunt Mary, I'll never do it again."

The two gentlemen and Hester Picker remained in the room, Mary again left it. The arm was crushed, rather badly; and Mr. Duffham knew it would require care and skill to cure it.

"You must send to Worcester for its best surgeon to help you," said the baronet, when the dressing was over. "I feel that I am responsible to Major Layne."

Old Duffham drew his eyes together as he glanced at the speaker. "I don't think it's necessary," he said; "no surgeon can do more than I can. However, it may be satisfactory to Major Layne that we should be on the safe side, so I'll send."

When the child was ready, Mary got into the fly, which had waited, and Mr. Duffham put him to lie on her lap.

"I hope, Miss Layne, I may be allowed to call to-morrow and see how he gets on," said Sir Geoffry at the same time. And she did not feel that it was possible for her to say No. Mr. Duffham got up beside the driver; to get a sniff he said of the evening air.

"How he is changed! He has suffered as I have," murmured Mary

Layne to herself, as her tears fell on Baby Arthur, asleep now. "I am very thankful that he has no suspicion."

The child had said Don't tell grandmamma : but to keep it from Mrs. Layne was simply impracticable. With the first stopping of the fly at the door, out came the old lady ; she had been marvelling what had become of them and was wanting her tea. Mr. Duffham took her in again, and said a few words, making light of it, before he lifted out Baby Arthur.

A skilful surgeon was at the house the next day, in conjunction with Mr. Duffham. The arm and its full use would be saved, he said ; its cure effected : but the child and those about him must have patience, for it might be rather long about. Arthur said he should like to write to his papa in India and tell him that it was his own fault for running away from Aunt Mary : he could write letters in big text hand. The surgeon smiled, and told him he must wait to write until he could use both arms again.

They had not left the house many minutes when Sir Geoffrey Chavasse called, having walked over from the Grange. Miss Layne quitted the room when she heard who it was, leaving her mother to receive him. The old lady, her perceptions a little dulled with time and age, and perhaps also her memory, felt somewhat impressed and fluttered at the visit. To her it almost seemed the honour that it used to be : that one painful episode of the past seemed to be as much forgotten at the moment as though it had never had place.

Arthur was lying close before the window, in the good light of the fine morning. It was the first clear view Sir Geoffrey had obtained of him. The garden-parlour at the Grange faced the east, so that the room on the previous evening, being turned from the setting sun, had been but shady at the best, and the sofa was at the far end of it. As Sir Geoffrey gazed at the child now, the face struck him as being like somebody's ; he could not tell whose. The blue eyes especially, turned up in all their eager brightness to his, seemed quite familiar.

"He says I must not write to papa until I get well," said Arthur, who had begun to look on Sir Geoffrey as an old acquaintance.

"Who does?" asked the baronet.

"The gentleman who came with Mr. Duffham.

"It is the doctor from Worcester, Sir Geoffrey," put in old Mrs. Layne. She was sitting in her easy-chair near ; her spectacles keeping the place between the leaves of the closed Bible on her lap ; her withered hands, in their black lace mittens and frilled white ruffles, crossed upon the Book. Every now and then she nodded with incipient sleep.

"I am so very sorry this should have happened," Sir Geoffrey said, turning to Mrs. Layne. "The little fellow was running up to get a look at the peacock, it seems ; and I was riding rather fast. I shall never ride fast round that corner again."

"But, Sir Geoffry, they tell me that the child ran right against you at the corner : that it was no fault of yours at all, sir."

"It was my fault, grandmamma," said Arthur. "And, Sir Geoffry, that's why I wanted to write to papa ; I want to tell him so."

"I think I had better write for you," said Sir Geoffry, looking down at the boy with a smile.

"Will you ? Shall you tell him it was my fault ?"

"No. I shall tell him it was mine."

"But it was not yours. You must not write what's not true. If Aunt Mary thought I could tell a story, or write one, oh I don't know what she'd do. God hears all we say, you know, sir."

Sir Geoffry smiled—a sad smile—at the earnest words, at the eager look in the bright eyes. Involuntarily the wish came into his mind that *he* had a brave, fearless hearted, right-principled son, such as this boy was.

"Then I think I had better describe how it happened, and let Major Layne judge for himself whether it was my fast riding or your fast running that caused the mischief."

"You'll tell about the peacock ? It had its tail out."

"Of course I'll tell about the peacock. I shall say to Major Layne that his little boy—I don't think I have heard your name," broke off Sir Geoffry. "What is it ?"

"It's Arthur. Papa's is Richard. My big brother's is Richard, too ; he is at King's College. Which name do you like best, sir ?"

"I think I like Arthur. It is my own name also."

"Yours is Sir Geoffry."

"And Arthur as well."

But at this juncture old Mrs. Layne, having started up from a nod, interposed to put a summary stop to the chatter, telling Arthur in a cross tone that Mr. Duffham and the other doctor had forbid him to talk much. And then she begged pardon of Sir Geoffry for saying it, but thought the doctors wished the child to be kept quiet and cool. Sir Geoffry took the opportunity to say adieu to the little patient.

"May I come to see the peacock when I get well, Sir Geoffry ?"

"Certainly. You shall come and look at him for a whole day if grandmamma will allow it."

Grandmamma gave no motion or word of assent, but Arthur took it for granted. "Betsey can bring me if Aunt Mary won't ; she's my nurse, sir. I wish I could have him before that window to look at while I lie here to get well. I like peacocks and musical boxes better than anything in the world."

"Musical boxes !" exclaimed Sir Geoffry. "Do you care for them ?"

"Oh yes, they are beautiful. Do you know the little lame boy who

can't walk, down Piefinch cut? His father comes to do grandmamma's garden. Do you know him, Sir Geoffry? His name's Reuben."

"It's Noah the gardener's son, sir," put in Mrs. Layne aside to Sir Geoffry. "He was thrown down stairs when a baby, and has been a cripple ever since."

But the eager, intelligent eyes were still cast up, waiting for the answer. Where *have* I seen them? mentally debated Sir Geoffry, alluding to the eyes.

"I know the name," he answered.

"Well, Reuben has got a musical box, and it plays three tunes. He's older than I am. He's ten. One of them's the 'Blue-bells of Scotland.'"

Sir Geoffry nodded and got away. He went straight over to Mr. Duffham's, and found him writing a letter in his surgery.

"I hope the child will do well," said the baronet, when he had shaken hands. "I have just been to see him. What an intelligent, nice little fellow it is."

"Oh he will be all right again in time, Sir Geoffry," was the doctor's reply, as he began to fold his letter.

"He is a pretty boy too, very. His eyes are strangely like someone's I have seen, but for the life of me I cannot tell whose?"

"*Really?*"—do you mean it?" cried Mr. Duffham speaking, as it seemed, in some surprise.

"Mean what?"

"That you cannot tell."

"Indeed I can't. They puzzled me all the while I was there. Do you know? Say, if you do."

"They are like your own, Sir Geoffry."

"Like my own!"

"They are your own eyes over again. And yours—as poor Layne used to say; and as the picture in the Grange dining-room shows us also, for the matter of that—are Sir Peter's. Sir Peter's, yours, and the child's: they are all the same."

For a long space of time, as it seemed, the two gentlemen gazed at each other. Mr. Duffham with a questioning and still surprised look: Sir Geoffry in a kind of bewildered amazement.

"Duffham! you—you—Surely it is not *that* child!"

"Yes, it is."

He backed to a chair and stumbled into it, rather than sat; somewhat in the same manner that Mrs. Layne had backed against the counter nearly seven years before, and upset the scales. The old lady seemed to have aged, since, quicker than she ought to have done: but her face then had not been whiter than was Geoffry Chavasse's now.

"Good heavens!"

The dead silence was only broken by these murmured words that

fell from his lips. Mr. Duffham finished folding his note, and directed it.

"Sir Geoffry, I beg your pardon! I beg it a thousand times. If I had had the smallest notion that you were ignorant of this, I should never have spoken."

Sir Geoffry took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. Some moisture had gathered there.

"How was I to suspect it?" he asked.

"I never supposed but that you must have known it all along."

"All along from when, Duffham?"

"From—from—well, from the time you first knew that a child was over there."

Sir Geoffry cast his thoughts back. He could not remember anything about the child's coming to Church Dykely. In point of fact, the Grange had been empty at the time.

"I understood that the child was one of Captain and Mrs. Layne's," he rejoined. "Everybody said it; and I never had any other thought. Even yesterday at the Grange you spoke of him as such, Duffham."

"Of course. Miss Layne was present—and Hester Picker—and the child himself. I did not speak to deceive you, Sir Geoffry. When you said what you did to me in coming away, about calling in other advice for the satisfaction of Major Layne, I thought you were but keeping up appearances."

"And it *is* so, then!"

"Oh dear yes."

Another pause. Mr. Duffham affixed the stamp to his letter, and put the paper straight in his note-case. Sir Geoffry suddenly lifted his hand, like one whom some disagreeable reflection overwhelms.

"To think that I was about to write to Major Layne! To think that I should have stood there, in the old lady's presence, talking boldly with the child! She must assume that my impudence is unblushing."

"Mrs. Layne is past that, Sir Geoffry. Her faculties are dulled: three parts dead. *That* need not trouble you."

The baronet put aside his handkerchief and took his hat to leave. He began stroking his nap with his coat sleeve.

"Does my mother know of this, do you think?"

"I am sure she neither knows it nor suspects it. No one does, Sir Geoffry: the secret has been entirely kept."

"The cost of this illness must be mine, you know, Duffham."

"I think not, Sir Geoffry," was the surgeon's answer. "It would not do, I fear. There's no need, besides: Miss Layne is rich now."

"Rich! How is she rich?"

And Mr. Duffham had to explain. A wealthy gentleman in India, some connection of the Laynes, had died and left money to Mary

Layne. Six or seven hundred a year; and plenty of ready means. Sir Geoffry Chavassee went out, pondering upon the world's changes.

He did not call to see the invalid again; but he bought a beautiful musical box at Worcester, and sent it in to the child by Duffham. It played six tunes. The boy had never in his life been so delighted. He returned his love and thanks to Sir Geoffry; and appended several inquiries touching the welfare of the peacock.

The first news heard by Lady Chavassee and Lady Rachel on their coming home, was of the accident caused to Major Layne's little son, by Sir Geoffry's horse. Hester Picker and the other servants were full of it. It happened to be the day that Sir Geoffry had gone to Worcester after the box, so he could not join in the narrative. A sweet, beautiful boy, said Hester to my ladies, and had told them he meant to be a soldier when he grew up, as brave as his papa. Lady Chavassee, having digested the news, and taken inward counsel with herself, decided to go and see him: it would be right and neighbourly, she thought. It might be that she was wishing to bestow some slight mark of her favour upon the old lady before death should claim her: and she deemed that the honour of a call would effect this. In her heart she acknowledged that the Laynes had behaved admirably well in regard to the past; never to have troubled her or her son by word or deed or letter; and in her heart she felt grateful for it. Some people might have acted so differently.

"I think I will go and see him too," said Lady Rachel.

"No, pray don't," dissented Lady Chavassee hastily. "You already feel the fatigue of your journey, Rachel: do not attempt to increase it."

And as Lady Rachel really was fatigued and did not care much about it, one way or the other, she remained at home.

It was one of Mrs. Layne's worst days—one of those when she seemed three parts childish—when Lady Chavassee was shown into the drawing-room. Mary was there. As she turned to receive her visitor, and heard the maid's announcement "Lady Chavassee," a great astonishment inwardly stirred her, but her manner remained quiet and self-possessed. Just a minute's gaze at each other. Lady Chavassee was the same good looking-woman as of yore; not changed, not aged by so much as a day. Mary *was* changed: the shy inexperienced girl had grown into the woman who had known sorrow, who had got its marks impressed on her face. She had been pretty once, she was gravely beautiful now. Perhaps Lady Chavassee had not bargained for seeing *her*; Mary had certainly never thought thus to meet Lady Chavassee: but here they were, face to face, and must make the best of it. As they did; and with easy courtesy, both being gentlewomen. Lady Chavassee held out her hand, and Mary put hers into it.

After shaking hands with Mrs. Layne—who was too drowsy properly to respond, and shut her eyes again—my lady spoke a few pleasant

words : of regret for the accident, of her wish to see the little patient, of her hope that Major and Mrs. Layne might not be allowed to think any care on Sir Geoffry's part could have averted it. Mary went up stairs with her. Lady Chavassee could but be struck with the improved appearance of the house, quite suited now to be the abode of gentle-people ; and with its apparently well-appointed if small household.

The child lay asleep : his nurse, Betsey, sat sewing by his side. The girl confessed that she had allowed him sometimes to run in and take a look at the peacock. Lady Chavassee would not have him awakened : she bent and kissed his cheek lightly ; and talked to Mary in a whisper. It was just as though there had been no break in their acquaintance-ship, just as though no painful episode, in which they were antagonistic actors, had ever occurred between them.

"I hear you have come into a fortune, Miss Layne," she said, as she shook hands with Mary again in the little hall before departure. For Hester Picker had told of this.

"Into a great deal of money," replied Mary.

"I am glad to hear it ; *glad*," came the parting response, whispered emphatically in Mary's ear, and it was accompanied by a pressure of the fingers.

Mr. Duffham was standing at his door, watching my lady's exit from Mrs. Layne's house, his eyes lost in wonder. Seeing him, she crossed over, and went in, Mr. Duffham throwing open the door of his sitting-room. She began speaking of the accident to Major Layne's little son, —what a doleful pity it was, but that she hoped he would do well. Old Duffham replied that he hoped so too, and thought he would.

"Mrs. Layne seems to be getting very old," went on Lady Chavassee. "She was as drowsy as she could be this afternoon : she seemed scarcely to know me."

"Old people are apt to be sleepy after their dinner," returned the doctor.

And then there was a pause. Lady Chavassee (as Duffham's diary expresses it) seemed to be absent in manner that day, as if she were thinking to herself instead of him. Because he had nothing else to say, he asked after the health of Lady Rachel. That aroused her at once.

"She is not strong. She is not strong. I am sure of it."

"She does not seem to ail much, that I can see," returned Duffham, who often had to hear this same thing said of Lady Rachel. "She never requires medical advice."

"I don't care : she is not strong. There are no children," continued Lady Chavassee, dropping her voice to a whisper ; and a kind of piteous, imploring expression darkened her eyes.

"No."

"Four years married, going on for five, and no signs of any. No signs of children, Mr. Duffham."

"I can't help it, my lady," returned Duffham.

"Nobody can help it. But it is an awful misfortune. It is beginning to be a great trouble in my life. As the weeks and months and years pass on—the *years*, Mr. Duffham—and bring no hope, my very spirit seems to fail. 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.'"

"True."

"It has been the one great desire of my later years," continued Lady Chavasse, too much in earnest to be reticent, "and it does not come. I wonder which is the worst to be borne: some weighty misfortune that falls and crushes, or a longed-for boon that we watch and pray for in vain? The want of it, the eager daily strain of disappointment, has become to me worse than a nightmare."

Little Arthur Layne, attended by Betsey, spent a day at the Grange on his recovery, invited to meet the peacock. The ladies were very kind to him: they could but admire his gentle manners, his fearless bearing. Sir Geoffrey played a game at ninepins with him on the lawn—which set of ninepins had been his own when a child and had been lying by ever since. Betsey was told she might carry them home for Master Layne: Sir Geoffrey gave them to him.

After that, the intercourse dropped again, and they became strangers as before. Except that Lady Chavasse would bow from her carriage if she saw Mrs. or Miss Layne, and Sir Geoffrey raise his hat. The little boy got more notice: when they met him out, and were walking themselves, they would, one and all, stay and speak to him.

So this episode of the accident seemed to fade into the past, as other things had faded: and the time went on.

And as to me, I do fear you will be fit to smother me, and the magazine's furious. For there is a little more to come yet, and it can't go in till next month. The crime is Duffham's, not mine. Why did he go and spin out his account of things?

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



A RIDE THROUGH THE HEATHER.

THE thunder of cannon re-echoes from the Baltic to the Mediterranean. The traveller who lays his head on his pillow at night in an hotel on the Rhine, falls asleep with an unpleasant doubt in his mind as to whether he shall be awakened in the morning by the chambermaid's familiar knock or by the apparition of a gendarme at his bedside with the news that he is arrested as a spy. These things do not exactly suit the taste of the tired man of business or literature, who goes abroad for rest, or the fancy of the merry English family seeking for amusement. Foreign Murrays and Bradshaws are laid with a sigh on the book-shelf, travelling bags and knapsacks are thrown into the lumber closet, and the unfortunate sons and daughters of the Metropolis prepare to spend the autumn among bricks and mortar, enlivened only by a whiff of sea air, tainted with London smoke, at Ramsgate, or five days' run down to those dreary old Welsh mountains which every one knows by heart.

In a season, therefore, like the present, a tract of beautiful yet little-known country within the British islands must be a true El Dorado to the tourist. Between North Devon and the Bristol Channel, round about Dunkerry, in West Somerset, such a tract does in reality exist. There are deep, woody valleys, where streams flash and dance; and wild reaches of heathery ground, where the red stag feeds, which are a million times less familiar to the wanderer's feet than the Grindel Wald or the Mer de Glace. There are legends more quaint or pathetic than those of the Brocken, popular fancies more unhackneyed and graceful than those of the Oberland, and types of peasant character more rich in naïve humour and feeling than those of the Tyrol. It is in the hope that, if the reader should form one of the large band of tourists who throng beautiful but well-known North Devon, he may be induced to leave the beaten track to explore this unknown land, I now invite him to catch a glimpse of it by following me in the spirit in a "Ride through the Heather."

It is a lovely September afternoon, in which summer and winter seem for a brief space to be holding friendly intercourse together, just as a nun, out of whose mind the holy water had not quite washed all taste for worldly gossip, might hold intercourse through her convent grating with a court beauty. There is a fresh easterly breeze blowing, with just a touch of ice in his breath, but the sun is pouring down a genial shower of sunbeams. The trees have here and there upon their leaves a hectic flush, but the long melodious note of the blackbird

and the rippling music of the lark are resounding through the air as cheerily as when they rang in the birthday of the spring. There being in this quiet agricultural district neither the "horse of brass" of the Tartar King nor the winged steed of the Paladins for the reader's accommodation, he must, if he wishes to accompany me, borrow a broomstick from one of the old witches of whom there are two or three residing in the village hard by, and thus supernaturally mounted he will easily be able to keep pace with my pretty, lazy, self-opinionated little brown mare.

The attendant who runs by my side is a boy, who has the reputation of being at once the cleverest and most mischievous spirit in the whole parish. He knows by heart half the books in our village library, as well as the sheltered corners of the wood in which blackberries and nuts most abound. He has a monkey-like aptitude for imitating everything he sees. He is never still, even in church, and when the vicar exceeds his fifteen minutes always begins to write the catechism backwards on the front of the pew, to try if by this means he can raise the personage popularly supposed to be called up by such exercises, and thus to put an end to the sermon. He and I are firm friends, though in my Sunday class he is frequently guilty of some such delinquencies as sewing together the coat tails of two of his comrades, making an exact pantomimic representation of a tailor at his work, for the benefit of the company in general, or cutting his name on a form with a pen-knife. He certainly confirms in a remarkable manner the saying of an old maiden lady of my acquaintance, that the male half of human kind are never quite grown up before they are thirty.

And now we are proceeding up a deep, narrow lane, which grows every minute deeper and narrower, until, what with the height of the hedges, and what with the thick network made overhead by the interlacing of unpruned branches, we are almost as much protected from sun and wind as if we were in a sea nymph's cave. These Devonshire lanes hold in their depths a wondrous wealth of beauty. The white *Convolvulus* shines out like a moonbeam, which, having fallen last night into this tranquil retreat, was captured by the guardian spirit of the place, and kept to adorn his domains. The graceful tendrils of the wild hop cling around the banks in an imploring feminine sort of way that makes you think of *Andromache* hanging on the hand of *Hector*. The *Loose-strife* rears aloft her queenly purple spikes; the wild *Marjoram* blushes among the feathery grass; the innumerable family of the ferns—each one more elegant, and, the botanists tell us, each one more rare than her sister—droop on every side in tangled profusion. Truly, as you hold in your hand one of these delicate sprays, the finest work of the loom or the needle looks coarse beside it, and man's skill seems very small indeed to your eyes.

We advance but slowly, for my companion, Billy, cannot resist the

temptation offered him by clusters of juicy blackberries to make an afternoon lunch. I know that this is an innocent little bit of boy nature, and therefore do not chide or hurry him. As for the mare, her proceedings are of the most whimsical, not to say singular, character. Now she makes a grab at a tuft of grass in the hedge that has particularly taken her fancy; now she pauses to dip her soft little brown velvet muzzle in the clear springs, which in this land of rivers of waters well up at intervals by the wayside, and tosses about the bright drops with a half playful, half nonchalant air, just as a young lady might toss about the gems in a jeweller's shop; now she starts suddenly at a gateway, as though she saw some grim spectral face grinning at her over it; sometimes she all at once fixes her large intelligent eyes upon a stray leaf or stone that happens to be lying in the road, pricks her mobile ears till they nearly meet, and walks slowly backwards for a few steps, like a dame of olden days dancing a minuet. Only after much coaxing can she be brought to pass the object at which she has taken exception. Sometimes also she quite unexpectedly raises her small, deer-like head, arches her long neck, and hurries forward with short, proud, quick steps, just as if she heard the drums and trumpets of a fairy band playing a march somewhere near her in the air. The conversation between Billy and myself is very varied. First I draw from him confessions concerning certain misdeeds of his—confessions which vicar, curate, and schoolmaster have hitherto striven to extort in vain. Then he informs me that Sir Walter Raleigh, whose life he has just been reading, was a stunning fine fellow, and somewhat perplexes me by questions regarding that hero. Afterwards he relieves my overtaxed brain by relating to me a strange fable about a deep pool somewhere in the Exe—for such is one of our local traditions—which is said to be bottomless, so that if you throw a stone into it, that stone will make its appearance again in Australia.

All at once, as we are talking, our eyes become dazzled. We have left the twilight of the lane. We are in the sunlight, and my horse's feet are treading upon a magnificent carpet, where, in one gorgeous web flash together all the varied shades of purple that ever glowed around an Eastern sunset, or trembled upon a Southern sea, or played in a Northern rainbow, interspersed with streaks of white, patches of green, and masses of burnished gold. Do not start, reader, and think that I have suddenly drifted out of this common-place world into a fairy tale. No, we are still in a region of sober reality, and it is only that we are come out upon the heather. When we grow a little more accustomed to the brightness of the place, we perceive that the different purple tints arise from the various stages of blossom through which the heather is passing. This wild heath reminds us somewhat of a fashionable ball-room, where blooming girls, angular spinsters, round matrons, and laboriously got-up dowagers, all mix together. The green colouring is

the bracken, the gold is the gorse, and the white is the little dodder, which loves to creep curiously in and out among the heather, listening to what the purple bells whisper to each other in the wind. If we look closer into our rich carpet we shall notice here and there in its texture a delicate green arabesque pattern. This is the stag's-head moss, which belongs to the highest nobility among the natives of our hills, and which is so rare that it is seldom found elsewhere, even in mountainous countries. Little heeded by us, amid all the glories of the heather and the gorse, we observe a small, dingy, uninteresting-looking plant. Yet, notwithstanding our slighting glance at it, this little plant has clothed the naked, has fed the hungry, and has even arrayed the rich in purple; in short, it has done more good than all the languid darlings of the hot-house and flaunting queens of the garden put together. This is the whortleberry, by the gathering of which through the summer months considerable sums are earned by the poor children of the district, and which, being sold to dealers who go around to pick up the fruit, is eventually used in manufactories for the composition of some of their most brilliant purple dyes.

We are now advancing up a steep slope. On our right there is a deep and very picturesque gorge, which is filled with the golden gorse, and has a little stream dancing through it. Beside this stream, low down in the gorge, we notice two or three low walls with ivy entwined around them. There is in the local annals a rather singular, sad little tradition connected with this ruin. It is said that during the terrible old days of revolution in France, there came into these western solitudes two elderly French female emigrants, who took up their residence in the cottage that stood on this spot. There they dwelt for some years, holding very little communication with the people of the country, and without their former rank in society or even their names being disclosed to any one. What they lived upon was a constant problem to their few neighbours: for the small measure of milk which they daily took in, and the scanty provision of bread purchased by them was, the gossips affirmed, totally inadequate for the sustenance of two human beings. One morning the girl who took the milk to the cottage found her summons at the door unanswered. After waiting a little while, she entered, and there she found the two poor women lying side by side on their bed, cold and dead. On an examination being made of the cottage, there were only found in it, besides a few wretched pieces of furniture, several large flower-pots filled with slugs. A farmer of the neighbourhood, who had heard of the strange food sometimes used by foreigners, at once came to the conclusion that these slugs had formed the chief diet of the unhappy women, and his hypothesis was immediately received as gospel in the district, and as such has been handed down ever since. I fall to musing upon this sad story, and think that, if it were not for that horribly unpoetical fact about the slugs, I might mould it into a few

pathetic little stanzas. Billy perceives that my attention is absorbed, and in the midst of my meditations I have an uncomfortable, hazy sort of consciousness that he is pulling derisive faces at the authoress. Just as I have hammered out a couplet full of fine sentiment, the two lines are suddenly sent flying, one to the east, the other to the west, and I, familiar though I am with my saddle, am nearly separated from it, by the mare all at once whisking round with a bound. There is a noise of wings above our heads. When I recover myself, I find that a blackcock, who was lying among the heather, has been startled by our approach, and taken flight. Billy grins, and I feel a strong inclination to box his ears, but after a moment's reflection, think it best for my dignity to laugh with him.

As we ascend higher there is a lightness and briskness in the air that would, I am certain, have a most remarkable and salutary effect upon any one not accustomed to it. The faded belle, could this mountain breeze once wrap her in its embrace, would come out of it *rajeunie* without the intervention of beauty baths. The dyspeptic epicure, could a puff of this wind once strike upon his face, would feel his dinner digest without the aid of pepsine. The used-up man of talent, whose intellects have been half washed out, but not by water, would (if these airs could play around his lips) find the stream of sparkling wit flow from his mouth as freely as the champagne usually flowed into it. Perhaps, however, the reader of this paper may have his doubts as to the efficacy of hill country air for producing this latter effect.

Billy is evidently beginning to think our expedition rather slow, for he pulls off his cap, and producing his valued friend, the penknife, begins to carve an eccentric pattern upon its brim. Down in the gorge, at some little distance from us, where the furze bushes are thickest, we distinguish a rustling sound, and stop to listen. The noise grows louder, and the mare turns in the direction from whence it comes her small clever head, inherited from her Exmoor sires. Almost involuntarily I grasp tighter the rein, and Billy puts on his cap and is very still. There is upon all three of us the shadow of a great presentiment, such as used to fall upon Mrs. Radcliffe's incarcerated heroines when the hero was about to leap in at the window; a presentiment which tells us that the chief event of our day is at hand. And so it is in truth, for with his glorious branchy head tossed proudly aloft, and with vigorous grace in his every movement, there springs up from among the furze a magnificent red stag, who scours fleetly away over the heather. Good luck to you, noble fellow! may the eager band of hounds, ladies, and gentlemen (fearless riders and gallant dogs though they be), who to-morrow will be filling these solitudes with merry life, be unsuccessful if they get upon your track. Having beheld this culminating glory of the hills, Billy and I deem it best to make our way homeward. We cross the stream, and soon lose the sound of its low, never-ending melody, which has

always to my fancy something sad and mysterious about it that reminds me of the song of a maniac who sits ceaselessly crooning over and over again some mournful ditty.

Very soon, after descending a little over the heath, we reach what is called a cart-road, but what is in reality merely a succession of stones of different sizes thrown one upon the other. This descent would puzzle a great deal, no doubt, any showy Rotten Row canterer, or well-trained watering-place hack; but the mare, with the reins upon her neck, proceeds down it with a step as firm as that of a grenadier upon parade, and as light as that of a female Blondin upon a tight-rope. After a while we reach a better and smoother road, and then Billy and the mare, their suppers growing every moment less visionary and more substantial to their view, stride along at a rapid pace that soon brings us very near home. The sun is gone to bed, as far as the valleys are concerned as we pass along them. The cart-horses, having finished their day's work, are feeding or rolling in the fields. All nature looks drowsy. Good night, therefore, patient reader; if I have wearied you, I have at least given you a sleeping draught.

ALICE KING.



A STORY OF MODERN IRELAND.

ON the west coast of Ireland, a large island, called Inismore, stands loftily from the water; a real sea-girt mountain range; wild lakes nestling in its hollows, and brown reaches of heathery hill, ending in abrupt cliffs, dropping nearly a thousand feet perpendicularly. At the foot of the cliffs the deep, deep water is always heaving and sinking to the Atlantic swell. On the south-eastern side the sea is calmer, and the shore shelves gently to the pier, from which the boats make their constant passage to the mainland, three miles distant.

The only house of any pretension on the island was rented, one year prior to the date of my story, by a Scotch family, consisting of two brothers and a sister, named Fergusson. They kept "the shop"—a store of heterogeneous articles: cotton and stuff dresses; indigo to dye the home-spun flannel; "white bread," the holiday luxury of the islanders; tobacco, tea, and whiskey. The sister, Jean, was a dark, stately woman, cold and unimpressible certainly, but the object of the devoted attachment of one of the men in the constabulary force, a countryman of her own, Sergeant M'Kay. He pressed his suit earnestly and persistently, but the brothers Fergusson opposed him to a violent degree. It might have been their opposition, as much as the tall, handsome person of her lover, that roused at last the phlegmatic nature of Jean into acceptance; but accept him she did, and met her brothers' bitter words with the same indifference with which she had formerly listened to M'Kay's courtship.

"Ye'll be wanting me to stay wi' ye," she said; "but the sairgent is as guid as maist folks, and winna flyte me as ye've bin' doing." Ye think ye'll no' spare me fra' measuring the flour, and giving the coos their bit at nights; and mebbe, Robert, ye've na got me forty pound of siller to give as my ain share to me weddin' dower? Hech, weel! a body must e'en marry some time; so ye may as well pay it noo, as ony ither day."

And so M'Kay and Jean carried the day; the ring was bought, and the licence procured.

It was a lovely summer morning as the wedding party left the island—John Fergusson, Jean, and their friends in two of the boats, while the sergeant and his men occupied the third. The little church on the mainland was crowded, for weddings are rare in the scantily-peopled districts of West Ireland, and all "the town" came to see Jeanie Fergusson married to the tall Scottish policeman. The elder brother was absent. He could not, or he would not, come; but if his dark

face was missed, it was certainly not wanted, for all felt his absence a relief.

It is the custom in Western Ireland to fire a kind of *feu-de-joie* on such occasions out of every available musket and pistol; and a perfect fusillade welcomed the bridal party, as the boats touched the pier on the return to the island. It was but a few steps to the house, and Duncan M'Kay drew his wife's arm through his, wishing with all his heart that the clamour was over, and he and his Jeanie away in the cottage he had been so eagerly preparing. Something of this he said, as he stooped to look in her face just as they entered the gate. An instant more, and a nearer report than any yet fired rang through the air. A woman's sharp cry, a deep groan from Duncan, and forward on the very threshold the bridegroom fell.

Jeanie and those around her stood still in horror for one instant; the next, Robert Fergusson ran down the stairs, his face white, even to the very lips. "It was an accident—an accident; only an accident!" he thickly articulated.

They lifted him up, and carried him into a little chamber above, stumbling over the gun—Robert's gun—which had so suddenly dealt the fatal wound. They sent for the doctor and the clergyman, but it was useless; no mere mortal could help him now. The heavy duck-shot had pierced his temple. A few hours of unconsciousness, and all was over. The following week the same boat that had borne him to his marriage held the long black coffin; and in the aisle of the church they laid it down, on the very spot his feet had trodden so firmly beside his bride.

Robert Fergusson, of course, was in custody. He was tried for murder; but he declared he did not know the gun contained anything but powder. He had gone, he said, to his bedroom for his gun, hearing the shots which announced their return. He had thrown up the window, and pointed the gun straight through it. His finger was on the trigger, when the insecure fastening which sustained the window-case gave way, and it fell down, depressing the barrels so that the shot struck the bridegroom as he stood exactly beneath. Such was his tale. It might be the truth: there was no proof to the contrary. At any rate, Robert Fergusson was found guilty of manslaughter, but acquitted of the graver charge. The "slate house" on the island was shut up. The goods in the shop were sold, and the brothers, together with the bride-widow, left the country for ever.

The following spring carpenters and masons were busy about the place. The counters were removed, partitions pulled down, glass doors put in, and a dining-room built. A carriage-sweep was planned, rustic bridges thrown over the mountain torrent in the adjoining glen, shrubs and trees were planted, and terraces were turfed. The owner of Inismore had determined to make a kind of shooting and

bathing box there. Accordingly, by the summer it was filled by a riotous party of children, and elder ones quite as merry, if a little more quiet.

The sad tragedy was outwardly forgotten : so terrible a thing was better left in silence. The sunny days were idled away, out on the rocks when the tide was low, or sailing on the sleepy sea, or getting up an impromptu riding party on the shaggy ponies. It was at this time that my brother and I received an invitation to join the party, and the prospect seemed so unusually fresh and charming that we accepted it with delight. The journey was long, and the railway only took us to a point thirty-eight miles distant from our destination, so that we were thoroughly tired as we stepped from the Irish car, with its tandem horses, on to the quay beside which the boat waited to convey us to the island.

How pleasant that life was ! so wild and free ;—as unlike as possible to the seaside existence of those good people who go for a tame trip each autumn to Filey, Bournemouth, or Torquay. No one did anything that they had ever done before. Early risers laid in bed until eleven o'clock, while those who never could get up anywhere else astounded us by coming in glowing and fresh to the breakfast table.

It was announced one morning that there was to be a regatta-committee meeting, or a petty sessions, or a "something" which would occasion the absence for two nights of all the gentlemen. We ladies declared we had anti-macassars to finish, letters to write, and gardening to accomplish, which would make their being away the most convenient thing possible ; and we laughed a little at our cosiness, as we drew down the blinds, and lit a fire that first night—that fire being certainly more for society than warmth. Womanlike, we talked and talked, and it was very late when the bedroom candles were lighted and the drawing-room deserted. My room was the one in which Duncan M'Kay had died. It was a little back chamber, and my hostess had assigned it to me with many apologies. "It is so small, my dear ; you don't mind that?—And of course you won't be afraid ? The poor people say it is haunted. It was here that that poor fellow died. You know all about it ? If you *are* afraid, you shall share Ellen's." But I was not afraid, and so, in the haunted room I had hitherto slept quietly and comfortably.

At this time I had the very bad habit of reading novels in my bedroom. This night my novel was unusually entertaining, and with my dressing-gown round my shoulders, my fingers lazily brushing out my hair, my eyes followed line after line of the book. I sat until long past midnight, my thoughts wrapped up in my story, when I was startled by a noise. A noise certainly, but a most indescribable one. Apparently coming from nowhere, it sighed and moaned through the room and died away. I started up. Was I dreaming ? All was quiet. "Bah ! I was half asleep : it was fancy, and I must go to bed." I coiled my

hair round my head, pulled off my dressing-gown, and began to wind my watch. But I nearly let it fall to the ground. Again, quivering faintly, but most really, came the ghostly sound. I looked at my face in the glass: it was strangely white.

"This will never do. I'm actually shaking with fear. It is only some man taking advantage of our defenceless womanhood to frighten us."

This supposition was bad enough, but I thought it a blessed alternative to that other hideous idea which came rushing into my mind.

"Poor Duncan M'Kay—rubbish!"—and stepping across the landing to the top of the stairs, I called Leo, the big Newfoundland, to see what *he* would think of this odd sound. He came lumbering up, and followed me into my room. But the rug before the dressing-table seemed to possess great attractions for him, and on it he curled himself comfortably to resume the nap my summons had interrupted. Leo's indifference made me yet more uneasy. Again and again the weird sighing sound came vibrating through the room.

I tried the servants this time, and called up two of them. They came wondering what I could possibly want at that hour. "Was I ill?" I purposely spun out my answer, for I wanted to see if they would hear the sound; if it was audible to other ears than mine; or if I alone was selected to be chilled and maddened by its hideousness. I had gone very far, you see; very far from clear calm sense; I was scared very deeply; I seemed to have realized a lifetime of thought in that half-hour.

I stood there, with my white face, replying and talking very much at random to the two maids, longing for the sound to come once more. I had not long to wait. I saw them start, and stare, and hold their breath; then down in a heap they fell, with a cry of "The Banshee, the Banshee! oh worra, worra, Miss Netley, it is the tall policeman's spirit! It is for death!"

The noise they made in some measure recalled my common sense; but it was in vain I tried to pacify them. "Oh miss, call the mistress!" said Norah, sobbing loudly.

"Go, Norah, certainly, and call her," I said; but Norah had no intention of venturing one step by herself. Nor was it necessary to call any one, for the shrill shrieks of the servants had effectually roused the household, and six ladies in very hasty toilettes crowded into my little room.

Of course everybody talked; everybody asked what it was, where it was, why it was? and quite drowned the faint vibrating sound that had so alarmed me: quite drowned it, if it sounded at all just then, which we afterwards had reason to doubt.

"Be quiet," I implored, turning first to the maids and the fat house-keeper, who had joined us, and was adding vigorously to the cabal. "Be quiet, and you will know as much as I do, though *that* certainly is but little."

Quiet they all were, standing in puzzled expectation—the two maids still crouched on the floor. The housekeeper and the nurse stood just outside the door, their eyes starting from their sockets with fright; fright at what they didn't exactly know. Mrs. Cranston, enveloped in a huge scarlet and white shawl, looked doubtfully at me. Rose and Jessie Ross, two English girls, who had never had former experience of "ghosts" or "banshees," stood clinging to each other, their hair, so fashionably "fuzzy" by day, screwed up in a complicated machinery of wire and ribbon. They also looked doubtfully at me. Lady Katherine Kilmore looked contemptuously at all. A strong-minded woman was her ladyship, with a very satisfactory opinion of her own mental powers. The group was finished by Mrs. and Miss Forder, sister and niece of our hostess. The former lady kept squeezing her hands together, and repeating hurriedly and incessantly, "I wish James was here, Ellen: I wish your papa was here."

It is said the sublime verges on the ludicrous—I don't think we looked exactly sublime, yet my feelings had been very grave and exceedingly deep; but as I looked round on the different positions, the varied countenances, to say nothing of the costumes, of our nocturnal gathering, the absurdity of the whole so tickled my fancy that I flung myself into a chair in uncontrollable fits of laughter.

"I thought so," said Jessie Ross, triumphantly. "It is only a trick of Ethel's."

"And in excessively bad taste," broke in Lady Katherine's clear, measured tones. "Had we not better return to our rooms? Mrs. Cranston, I will bid you good night."

This was certainly contrary to my intentions. To be left alone again with that moaning horror! My laughter was effectually quelled. I implored, I asserted, I coaxed, "Only stop, and wait, and be quiet; and indeed I will not laugh! Wait and listen;" and pushing an arm-chair forward for Lady Katherine, and getting a heap of cloaks for the benefit of the others, I settled them once more into quiet expectation. We waited and waited, my unruly laughter came up in my throat, and my mouth twitched with my efforts at self-control, when soft and vibrating and long drawn came the moaning, sighing sound that had before chilled me into terror.

Exclamations, suggestions burst from every lip; but, as usual, Lady Katherine's voice, in its low, measured tones, caught attention. "That noise came from underneath. *What is underneath this room?*"

She looked at Mrs. Cranston, but got no answer. Mrs. Cranston was trembling under her huge shawl, and her hand grasped mine tightly. It was the housekeeper who replied.

"The room under this is empty, my lady: it was a bakehouse in the Fergussons' time, and has a door to its own self."

"Then we must search the bakehouse; somebody must be there;

some one has concocted a vile scheme to terrify us. They must be discovered and brought to justice—if there is such a thing as justice in this outlandish place!" added her ladyship, sotto voce.

It was easy to say a search must be made, but who would make it? I said I would go if some one would accompany me. I wanted to unravel the riddle. I felt I must know the cause of that hideous moan. Earthly or unearthly, I must find it: know it to be one or the other. To my surprise Jessie Ross said she would go with me. I asked one of the more sensible of the maids to come too, but at the mere suggestion she fled screaming down the passage to the nurseries, and locked herself in with the still sleeping children. Jessie and I prepared for our tour of investigation. I took a pistol; Jessie declared she couldn't use fire-arms. "Something to hit with would be better—a kind of club." After a little search she lighted upon a telescope; a huge telescope drawn out to its fullest extent, which she pronounced the very thing. Certainly, it was by no means a weapon to be lightly encountered.

The night was so calm and beautiful that we took a candle from the chimney-piece in our hands without needing a lantern to shield it. We went round the house: I marching first with my candle and pistol, Jessie bravely bringing up the rear with her telescope.

I pushed open the bakehouse door, and looked in hastily. No visible being, no visible thing was there; it was a small room, white-washed and empty. We searched the stables, the wash-house, the garden—nothing alive or dead was to be seen that was out of place or unusual. We returned to the conclave upstairs with our report. *They* had heard the sound three times during our absence. What was to be done?

"If James were only here," repeated Mrs. Forder, "he would be sure to know all about it."

"This flooring is made of wreck timber," I said; "perhaps it might be the wind through the knot-holes or chinks."

"Yes," returned Lady Katherine, jealous of anyone making a suggestion but herself; "take up the carpet, and see if there are any holes."

The removal of the carpet discovered plenty of holes, indeed; but how could they cause the sound? There was no wind to whistle or moan through them; yet ever and anon the sound came, faint and mysterious, through the air, till even the bravest among us grew sick with dread.

"It is no use," said Mrs. Cranston. "Come to bed, everybody; and you, Ethel, go to Ellen's room; or will you come to mine?"

"No," I replied; "I cannot go off quietly to bed with this undiscovered mystery. I am going to try outside once more. Will you come, Jessie?"

Maria, the rough island girl who "helped in the kitchen," was

pressed into the service, and with Leo, the big Newfoundland, we started out again. All was calm and silent as before. The bright moon shone down on the summer sea. The few thatched cottages by the shore were silent and dark. The lazy roll of the Atlantic, as it "pluffed" against the cliffs on Inis Head, was the only sound breaking on the stillness, except— Ah! *except what?* In a kind of desperation I flung open the bakehouse door, and the gust it made extinguished our candle. We were exactly beneath the window of my room; I called up for matches, and there we stood silently waiting during the short delay. My foot was on the threshold, when there! there! again the sound! I was in it—at it. We kept our ground, too awed, perhaps, to run away. But would those matches *never* come?

Down they came from the window above our heads. My shaking hands struck a light. Yes, I confess it, my hands were shaking. But there was no retreat now; that bakehouse should be searched inch by inch.

Upstairs they soon heard a terrific clamour. Jessie's shrill shrieks, Maria's rough, loud voice shouting, mine raised to its fullest compass. "Oh mercy, mercy! don't, don't kill them! ah, don't!" And sharp, short barkings from Leo. No wonder Lady Katherine double-locked the door; no wonder Mrs. Cranston's fortitude quite gave way!

And the solution of the mystery? It is true, plainly and simply true; but it sounds absurdly ridiculous; and even as I write I wonder how a thing so trivial, so laughable, could have caused the abject terror, the cruel suspense, that it did.

I lit the candle; Maria followed me closely. As I flashed the light over the bare white walls there was a faint rustle at my feet. I looked down, and saw—ducks!—ducks!—fully five and twenty, reposing comfortably behind the door. So close they lay, we had not seen them on our first search, and might easily have overlooked them even this time, had it not been for the delay about the matches, when we stood so silent and still that the horrid creatures, fancying they were left undisturbed, again went on with their curious noises. The nostrils of a duck are very near the point of its bill. Perhaps it is this which causes them to utter this weird sound occasionally in breathing. Perhaps—but no; I can't explain it ornithologically. I only know these particular ducks made this particular sound, and that it was this insignificant little fact which had actually frightened even Lady Katherine into forgetfulness of common sense.

Maria flung herself upon the birds. "Och, and ye'll all be in the pot to-morrow, ye varmint," and she pitched them with no gentle hand through the door. They fluttered and flapped; and Leo considered it no more than his duty to assist in the scuffle by snapping at them as they were flung out. He killed one by a squeeze of his huge jaws. I generously tried to save the poor unlucky creatures, by vociferously

calling on Maria to be more tender, while Jessie screamed, half with laughter, half with excitement. That humiliating dénouement! Poor child! No wonder she was hysterical with the reaction.

We did not laugh much over our adventure that night; but when the clear daylight returned, and when our party of guardians and protectors came back to us, laugh we certainly did. Innumerable were the pleasantries and witticisms which we all had to endure—all but Lady Katherine. The dignity of her self-possession we dared not assail. She did not even like our night-vigil talked about. But even she could not forbear a smile, as we overheard Maria say to the timid Norah: "I'm astonished at ye, Norah. Ye were trem'lin' like the bog forenenst the lake. I wasn't a bit afeard. I *knew ducks* snored ever since I was the size of a ha'penny herrin'. And I juist bethought myself I niver put they cratures in their own house at night at all, at all, and so they juist dandered in there. Ach, but the quality's easy frightened! The likes o' *ducks*!"

"Well," responded the gentler Norah, "it looked to my mind as if ye were frightened as much as the rest. But Maria," and her voice grew low, "it might have been ducks, and it mebbe *was* ducks; but I'll not stay here. Next time it will be poor Sargent Duncan's ghost in rael earnest; and I'm not the so'ger you be. Was the seven sinses clane gone out of me when I hired in this woeful house? Maria, be wise, ye girl, and come away too!"



THE TRAVELLERS OF THE SEA.

SPREAD thy strong white pinions,
Traveller of the sea!
Lo! the south wind bloweth fresh,
Where thy course should be.
Many hearts have ached full sore
When the rough waves beat the shore;
Throbb'd like restless ebb and flow
When billows raged, and winds did blow;
Many bright eyes dim have grown
In that dreary vigil lone,
Quenching all their light in tears
Of Agony's prophetic fears.
Spread thy broad white pinions,
Wanderer of the main,
Thou wilt turn their grief to joy,
Coming back again!

Spread thy broad white pinions !
 Hast thou, hid below,
 All the precious cargo stored
 Whence our riches flow ?
 Safe across the perilous deep
 Has it voyaged in careful keep :
 Over sharp-toothed reef and rock,
 Through all the wild cyclone's shock ;
 O'er the pathless ocean wide,
 Steering by its polar guide.
 Wave and wind made woeful wreck,
 But they cleared *above* the deck !
 Spread thy broad white pinions !
 Bear it safely in,—
 Take the hard-earned golden fee
 Thou didst fairly win !

Spread thy storm-beat pinions
 In their native air :
 As a bird that nears her nest
 And her nestlings fair !
 Divers winds have whistled free
 Through thy shrouds on many a sea ;
 Tropic airs, with spicy balm,
 Breathed around thee weary calm ;
 Norland gales have stripped thee bare,
 Bent thy spars, and swept thee clear !
 Bird of Passage ! fold thy wings,
 Past are all these dangerous things !
 Spread thy tattered pinions
 Now thou'rt near thy home—
 Entering on the haven sure,
 Where no tempests come !

Spread the weary pinions
 Soon,—ah ! soon to close ;
 Home with all its joys is near,
 And at last—repose !
 Oh, how many prayers and hopes,
 Tugged unseen at all thy ropes !
 Longing sighs thy sails did fill,
 Love magnetic drew thee still !
 Little voices, low and deep,
 Prayed for thee, before their sleep,
 Oh, thou ark of many prayers,
 Filled thy sails with heavenly airs !
 Furl thy storm-rent pinions
 Closely to the mast,
 For a watchful Father's hand
 O'er thy way was cast ;
 Now the haven sought so long,
 Thou hast reached at last !

FRANCES FREELING BRODERIP.